

House of Representatives Standing Committee  
on Family and Community Affairs

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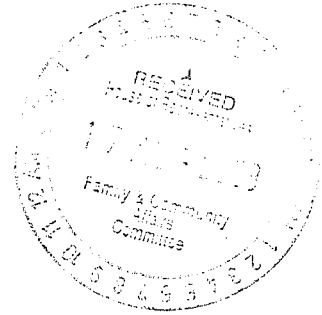
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## JACLYN'S STORY

Jaclyn is one of five children. Her parents split up when she was eleven. Her siblings were 20, 17, 15, and 4 years of age. I asked her, what would have been the ideal of shared parenting.

She flawed me with what is already so obvious in my life and in countless others. And that is what she said. I asked "What made it easier for you in the initial

stages of separation?" She said:

"Nothing - your family is everything. You have no other thing in your life, you have no car, no job, no relationship boyfriend/girlfriend, no career ..... this is the only thing in your life, the only thing you

know and then it is taken away."

It is not in the way I scribe her words, it is in her voice that tells me the hunger and the yearning that follows after separation. It is in her voice that tells me that her childhood innocence and trust has been shattered forever.

## **T O THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FAMILY AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS**

My name is Nelke, I am fifty years of age and have three children,

██████ - 30 years, ██████ - 10 years ████████████████████, ██████ - 6 years.

I left the marital home in ██████ (Sydney) last September and moved to ██████████ taking both boys with me. I left amicably even though I knew that the husband was having extra marital affairs. I left after four years of soul searching and heartache.

I expected and wanted him to have regular contact with the children through visits, phone calls, emails. I would be visiting and staying in the marital home with the children from time to time and he could come and visit or take them away. This arrangement of course would last until we made a decision as to whether our marriage was to survive. But surprise, he already had a new woman **and this 'slow' separation for the children's sake was not to be.**

During the first eight months of separation I had tried to maintain a friendly relationship. I used to email and ring to organise times for him to see them.

He begrudgingly took them on fortnightly weekend access, sleeping with the boys on mattresses in the lounge whilst the girlfriend slept in their main bedroom. He explained that there was friction and that she found it difficult to cope. He also works Saturday and Sunday mornings which makes for reasonable visits difficult. When things were pleasant between us I would ask him to come down to visit as well as me taking the boys to [REDACTED]. But anything out of the "fortnightly routine" was out of the question.

Communication broke down during the property settlement process and it was too difficult to maintain a relationship through the hostilities.

The husband now point blank refuses to see his children. Now it is 'no' or 'I can't'. Last Saturday fortnight ago, he saw them for five minutes in 3 months. He didn't ask to have them over the weekend or even for a few hours. Of late with my going back to [REDACTED] to clean the marital house etc. for the auction, the children have started to ask to see their father. They ask frequently now.

You may have personally suffered the loss of a mother or father through death, how empty and lonely is the 'goneness'. Gone where? You may understand at your age. But what do I say to my children when they ask to see their father?

What do I say to my nearly ten year old son [REDACTED] who is hardly verbal, when he says as clearly as crystal "Daddy, daddy go home to daddy". Six words that he has never spoken in a sentence in his ten years.

My children have to suddenly suffocate any feelings they had for their dad and pretend that he has never existed. Their longing for their father, to touch him, to feel his hairy arms, to be cuddled by his masculine strength has to be suppressed. They must steel themselves, harden themselves and totally annihilate any memory of their father. They cannot afford to dream of any comfort in their father's masculine strength as they will get none. This is having a devastating and long term detrimental effect. Not a phone call, an email, a letter, nothing.

This weekend we again visited [REDACTED] for the auction, again both children asked to see their father. And again 'no'.

This unfulfilled yearning, will manifest itself in later years as an addiction. An addiction to drugs, bad company, alcohol, anything that will comfort that yearning. I don't want to see that happen to these beautiful and sweetly innocent children.

## My submission contains the following presumptions:

- o The child's natural need (to be with its parents) is unnaturally suppressed, not nurtured, and with that is the child's validation.
- o A child is validated through the eyes and actions of the parents, if a child is rejected by a parent that child is devalued as a human on all levels.
- o If a parent turns a child against the other parent this is also devaluing the child as a human on all levels.
- o The term "shared parenting" is flawed. It evokes the image of sharing the child therefore competing for the child rather than being parents to the child.
- o I am advocating for the ideal, but will refer to it instead as "co-operative co - parenting".
- o "Meaning of shared parenting is that each parent commences on an equal footing , i.e. no assumptions are made. This is then the springboard for negotiations between parents to decide what is best for their children." Coral C.  
However I still believe in a custodial parent for the sake of stability of environment and routine, and therefore natural order for the child.
- o That the child has a right and indeed the need to see its grandparents.  
Denying the child a happy and comfortable relationship with grandparents is further isolating the child from what should be a natural birthright.  
The natural relationship with a grandparent is indeed of great depth and warmth and the child may have no other opportunity to have such experiences with the older generation or the elderly. No richness of wisdom, history, tradition and nana's cooking or pop's toolshed.

## To ascertain what the best interests of a child are:

I conducted a straw poll of thirty people - 15 male/15 female. (I know this is a small sample.)

Everyone had ideals for parenting. Most of the **answers, because they were spontaneous, were from the heart not from the intellect.**

My question is, if most parents have some ideal as to what they want for their children, i.e. security, comfort, love etc. and during the marriage strive (to any degree) to achieve this, then why can't it continue post separation?

In cases where abuse etc exists these will still go through the courts and the child's 'safety' will be a major consideration. However in the 50,000 divorces per year if **say 95% of these parents are of a reasonable nature and gave reasonable care to their children during the marriage then there should be a reasonable solution to the disputes that are occurring post separation**

# WHAT IS YOUR IDEAL OF PARENTING?

## Straw Poll question

<<< Dear friend,

I would like you to answer the following question in **one line** only. I **do not** want you to ponder the question but would like you to **spontaneously answer** the question. This is part of my submission to the Parliamentary joint standing committee on shared parenting.

### **What is your ideal of parenting?**

Please answer spontaneously.

.....  
love Nelke >>>

## Answers to straw poll

People polled: 30

Aged from: 25yrs - 85 yrs being 15 males and 15 females.

**Nelke W:** Validating the children through the eyes and actions of the parents.

**Margaret D:** Love, unconditional and time, not money.

**Sue C:** Patience, ability to talk, time.

**Rebecca C:** Teaching them to love and respect themselves and others.

**Lynette F:** Modelling behaviour and lifestyle to the next generation.

**Ebba B:** To assist and guide the child in his/her unfolding of individuality and uniqueness.

**Jaelyn C:** Communication

**Rita L:** Loving, firm, guidance on the path of social acceptance.

**Nerida B:** To enjoy your children and see them as a gift.

**Cindy G:** Understanding, love, disciplinary carer, mother and father sharing work load.

**Mary P:** Spending as much quality time with your children as possible.

**Coral C:** Ideal parenting is for children to have both parents participating in their upbringing, preferably together, but if not, amicably even though apart.

**Shirley Mc:** Loving and stable environment for children to grow up in.

**Elizabeth T:** To have equal time with the children.

**Julia W:** Providing your child with comfort and security at all times. And love.

- Bill M:** Being there for your children where ever and when ever required.
- Tom B:** Caring with love and guidance.
- Paul S:** My ideal is to provide a safe nurturing environment for my children to grow out of.
- Otto M:** Two parents.
- Mark C:** Teaching them right from wrong.
- Ian L :** Keep the kids in order and well behaved.
- Steve S:** To instil in the kids a sense of worth.
- Glen R:** It's the outcome that's important, not necessarily the style...hence the ideal outcome for successful parenting would be to have a person that is independent - in every sense - with sufficient confidence and self esteem to face the challenges of the world.
- Jeremy B:** Taking care of my kids as much as I can, as time allows
- Bill T:** To have a father and a mother.
- Geoff P:** Each parent has shared care, with the father having ultimate responsibility.
- Andrew G:** It is for children to be raised in a loving home with both parents present, to cater for their material and spiritual needs.
- Noel H:** Wow!! A hard one. Parenting to me is the opportunity to provide children with an environment where their physical, spiritual and emotional needs are met. Basically, adults providing a space where children are loved and nurtured so that they feel loved, valued, safe and respected.
- Paul H:** Spending time with your kids especially when they are young. If you don't, they look for other role models which may be their undoing.
- Matthew Mc.:** Where both mother and father are in a loving and harmonious relationship and the child is loved unconditionally and brought up in a way that is respectful, caring and good natured so that the child can have the most opportunities to fulfil their absolute potential.

TAKE NOTE THAT THE RESPONSES FROM FEMALES AND MALES ARE, IN ESSENCE, SIMILAR. BOTH MALES AND FEMALES HAVE THEIR CHILDREN'S BEST INTEREST AT HEART

(Interesting though that the males mentioned TWO PARENT FAMILIES more frequently than the females.)

## SO WHY DOES CO – PARENTING BREAK DOWN AFTER SEPARATION?

There are many obvious reasons.

But the basic reason I believe is, is that the conceptual thought to parent stems from breeding. Breeding is to raise children in our own likeness. A self desire. We seem to revert to this concept and thus the battle to keep the child in our own image begins.

This battle includes eradicating the enemy, being the partner and the partner's relatives. Then dominance rears up and the need to put down the partner emerges. This battle needs a victor and a vanquished and the spoils are the child. And this battle appears in many forms. (Or let's say reasons for co – operating parenting breakdown).

## STRATEGIES FOR **co-operative co - parenting**

OUR TODDLERS AND CHILDREN CANNOT SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

Give children a voice

**ONE: Speak to adults and young adults who have come from broken families.**

Have them tell their story.

**TWO: Establish and train a task force of just these adults and young adults to become mediators/counsellors.**

Re allocate money from the courts, Child Support Agency, Centalink to sensible and reasonable mediation and counselling.

**THREE: Introduce mandatory mediation.**

**FOUR: Regular Post Separation Mediation/Counselling**

**a. \* Identify what the father's ideal of parenting was pre - separation.**

List these

STRATEGIES to take ideal of parenting **forward into the future.**

**b. \* Identify what the mother's ideal of parenting was pre separation.**

List these

STRATEGIES to take ideal of parenting **forward into the future.**

**c. \* Identify what the third party's (the new partner) ideal of parenting is.**

List these (cleaning out the nest is not an ideal)

STRATEGIES to take ideal of parenting **forward into the future.**



#### **d. \* Identifying parent concerns**

These seem terribly trite but they are real examples of the battle.

**(i) Identify mother's concerns** e.g. "he is incapable of looking after the kids without me being there ..... The house nearly burnt down because he left the meat pie in the oven for too long ..... He is lazy and a bad example to my children..... His mates are all perverts .... He's run off with another woman and she's not touching them....."

**(ii) Identify father's concerns** e.g. "I've busted my guts all these years supporting her and the kids, and she goes off to the gym every day..... She never really did love me and she still expects me to pay for the kids..... And she's turning them against me...Bloody hell I hope they don't turn out to be like her..... "

**(iii) Identify the third party's (the new partner) concerns** e.g. "I love him/her dearly but we can't get on with our relationship because the kids are always around and they're so bad mannered..... they never say please or thankyou..... I trip over their toys ..... I just can't stand it...."

**FIVE:** As the answers from the poll were from the heart, we need, that is post separation, to now **intellectualise** the argument. What is best for my child, what are the needs of my child, how can I best parent my child. Doing away with the battle.

#### **SIX: Advertising - for co-operative co - parenting**

- billboards, media, radio, TV, magazines

- Advertising format to be agreed upon by adults and young adults who have come from broken families.

- Create co-operative co -parenting **logo**

#### **SEVEN:**

\*Abolish the rigidity of access, this in itself is an unnatural way for the child to develop. In a family situation a child freely and naturally sees both parents according to family routine.

\* Use the parent as a "babysitter" to be called upon when the other parent goes out, with or without a new partner. As we know there does come a time when this does happen.

\* Allow and encourage the child to communicate with the non custodial parent as often as he/she would in the family setting.

\* Allow the child to join in celebrations with the family of the non-custodial parent.

**EIGHT:** Be Reasonable  
Practical  
Sensible

**NINE:** Allow the child time to adapt to a new partner. If this partner appears shortly after separation ease the child's pain by being extremely discreet.

### **MARGARET'S STORY ..... extracts**

" ..... I feel 'short changed'; that I've missed out on something beautiful, that my children have missed out on something beautiful; that they have been deprived every child's birthright – a positive relationship with a much loved grandparent. We have all been denied our right to a loving, caring, supportive relationship with the man who is my father. We have been abandoned by someone we love very much ....."

" .....My father's abandonment has, I believe, caused my weaknesses. I sometimes "try too hard", thus pushing others away with my intensity. I am sometimes jealous of others who are close to people I care about, fear of them taking away that relationship. Has made me afraid of loss, being alone. It has made me feel inadequate, unlovable....." I see minor hiccups as major catastrophes. I never feel 100% secure in an intimate relationship, no matter how good it is in the present time.

" ....Joan rules the roost. She reads the letters and intercepts the phone calls..."

".... The man I thought nearly perfect had become the worst possible bastard he could be. Until then I had been so proud of you. When friends had slated their dads for one thing or another I had been proud and secure in the wonderful father I had. I believed I was uniquely blessed to have such a man as my father. Have you ever been totally shattered? We all were, and it has had a negative effect on all of our lives. ...."

"...Did you love us? Did loving Joan cancel out loving your children? Was abandoning us a trade-off to get her? ...."

" .... Don't you ever miss us? ..... and I still continue to strive to find something I can do to hear you say, 'Margaret, I love you. I'm proud of you.' ....."

Margaret was twenty seven years of age when her father left the family for another woman. He left six children ages ranging from 12 to 27. The mother had been a selfless wife for 28 years. The family was, as she says, a stable family with no hint of disharmony. Margaret as an adult could rationalize the betrayal, but to this day cannot come to terms with it and has been deeply affected. Her siblings have certainly these same feelings.

## SUMMARY

What then do we say about a child?

We need to look at all cases, those where a parent wants a relationship with his/her children to those who don't.

The ideal is to co-operatively co-parent our children.

The pain and shock that the child experiences which has a devastating and life long effect must be addressed.

We must also address the situation where a parent **does not want** to see his/her children. This sort of rejection is greatly devaluing.

Let our litany be **ease the suffering of our children**, they are not as resilient as we think.

Nelke Willow

Dip Ed.

Small business owner