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A Once and Always Father

H. Kirk Rainer



MY HOME
INDUSTRY

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*This project is dedicated to my kids...and
all the kids and their parents who love
them and want to be a part of their lives...*

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Book Beginning

The author has been divorced for about ten years (as of 2010). In most of this post-divorced period, his role as a father has been deemed unnecessary, even illegal. The conception of marriage that he formed as a young person and envisioned as an adult has been marred by circumstances that he believes could have been overcome without divorce. Yet, he still believes in marriage—the commitments and promises....

A Once and Always Father is about his marriage, divorce; and the post-divorce circumstance of being separated from his children. The “divorce industry” is the backdrop of a compelling story of fatherhood, family and faith. Coinciding with his commitments (and promises) is a very powerful force that he perceives as not only able, but is actually working to dismantle fathers, families and even faith if that were possible.

H. Kirk Rainer draws upon his observations and experiences as a husband and father—coupled with the works of numerous resources—to compose his story. The first part is composed of personal accounts that begin with courtship and continue beyond the divorce. As the story develops, relevant sources and dialogue augment his accounts with details of no-fault divorce, non-custodial parenting, and the single-parent family among other subjects. In all and through all, he takes the reader into the “two worlds” of the once parent, now non-custodial.



Lifetime Lifting

My idea of marriage was largely fostered by what I experienced in my natural family and what I learned from church family. Sure, I was aware of broken families, but I did not conceive or desire that for mine...

“Lifetime Lifting” is simply the idea or belief in the mutual encouraging between people—and in the matter of marriage, for a lifetime. I begin with this term or phrase to set the tone of the book; that is, a tone of encouragement for those whom I have listed in the dedication and acknowledgments—except for my Lord—whom encourages me.

Courtship and marriage is where this story begins; divorce and post-divorce life is where it continues; and the desire for reconciliation with my children is where it is ideally going. As to the life hereafter—when a lifetime of *lifting* is over—I trust that as an aging adult, I will have been more like a needing child to my Father, and more of a father to my children. As of right now, I believe that the first is true but the second is far from true; and to my regret and remorse, I begin this story in hope that both may be true.

The children came from marriage, and my marriage began in August of 1986; and the marriage was the culmination of many months of dating that began in the fall of 1984. It was in the fall, that I first remember her—although we had already met at

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church. Having returned to Jacksonville Florida after college, I was in my second year of life-after-college when we met. It seemed that most of my friends had married (or were in position); and so, careless at it might be, their marital status was reason enough to consider the same. Yes, I wanted to be married—but also felt compelled or pressured to be. If there was a time to marry and begin this next phase of life, it seemed that now was ideal.

I first considered calling her and finding-out more about her after a brief introduction at a ball game. A phone message, followed by a return, we talked; and then went on a first date, and then some more. The things that I remember most were her hair and this turquoise shirt that she wore; oh, I think she had some matching shoes if I remember correctly. It was with my wife—or friend at the time—with which I would first go to Disney World, to a Florida Gator football game, and in the many months to come, to engagement and matrimony. We did much together and increasingly grew in closeness and intimacy.

*Before we went
to the altar,
there was some
... difficult
times.*

Before we went to the altar, there was some dating—and with the dating came some difficult times. Without knowing to this day the possible reasons or causes, I will try to describe a few possibilities; but as a starting point, I had not dated much before our relationship, and was very untested or untrained when it came to relationships and women. My idea of marriage was largely fostered by what I experienced in my paternal family and what I learned from church family; but had nothing to do with any prior, serious relationships.

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Her past did include a relationship; a tragic story of her fiancé dying from Leukemia that had left her naturally grieved and, I think, somewhat idealistic of what could have been. I remember seeing a picture of the two of them and making a comment, “Is this a boyfriend?” With the understanding that developed over time, I could not forget the impulsive comment nor the compelling story of what could have been. I cannot say that I lived in the shadow of this intended husband, but as impulsive as my comment may have been, the possibility was so—for I think he may have been much more in her mind.

What I would also learn—though more after marriage—was of a difficult childhood growing-up in an alcoholic home. Every family has their skeletons or secrets, but the reputation of her father was something seldom mentioned—and even then—over a recurring story of how he took them (the children) to get ice-cream. The sordid story was intermittently pieced together—not by my wife or her siblings—but by the comments of a brother-in-law who had known the father. As the youngest of six children, my wife probably had vague memories of her father—who died when she was twelve—but what she did reveal was the reputation of the current step-father (that had shared the same addiction). Yes, her mother re-married a buddy of her father’s who was also an alcoholic too.

Any of us could probably *come clean* on some of the those secrets of the family; but I raise the matter to suggest that the importance of the father cannot be undervalued in the development of his children (or step-children)—to include his daughters. The father provides some model or image of what a man (and potential husband) could be like. For the daughter, the father is generally one of the first, and often times, mature males in her young life. In his book, *The Wonder of Girls*, Michael

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Gurian refers to a positive father-role as the *gifts of the father* (to his daughter).

In still another resource, *Fatherless America*, David Blankenhorn writes:

A father plays a distinctive role in shaping a daughter's sexual style and her understanding of the male-female bond. A father's love and involvement builds a daughter's confidence in her own femininity and contributes to her sense that she is worth loving... (46)

My wife's childhood experience was nothing like this (or with the "gifts of the father"); but on the contrary, the experience for her seemed to have been dire. She never spoke of her dad and the opinion of her step-dad was very poor—either relationship for which I would not really grasp until sometime after our marriage. What little I did gather was probably passed-over in view of romance, love and potential marriage; but I could not ignore the difficult times when she would abruptly end our relationship—when one day things seemed to be going well, only to learn the next that something was not.

As to whether there is a connection between this early on-again, off-gain relationship and the past (relationships), I cannot tell you with any certainty. What I did observe—and endure—was a very uncertain relationship that left me on a somewhat roller-coaster ride of romance. Was it something I said, something I did or maybe something I should have done, but didn't?

I remember one time, not long after we had been married, that I somehow overlooked her expectation for an Easter basket. Not realizing that she was expecting this sort of gift (at her age), I was clueless as to what I had done, or not done. Once realizing

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my error, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry—because I just couldn't understand why a young adult would expect an Easter basket. Maybe it's me, maybe it's being a man; but there was no maybe when it came to eggs on Easter.

I thought I was *a pretty good egg*, but I was very naïve (or negligent) in overlooking the past experience and relationship with her father and step-father. Any connection between these relationships and her pursuit of the “real family”—so imagined or found in her first and passing love—was equally amiss to my attention or consideration.

*I thought I was
a pretty good
egg, but I was
very naïve...*

To give some sense of *equal billing* however, my own experiences should be mentioned in this *background check*. Growing up in a military family, the situation could have been very different; and for one, the rule of the father was the law. A strong, sometimes-present father seems a marked difference in experience. In this military setting was a dutiful wife who *kept the fire burning* while he was deployed or departed for operations. She took command while he was away, and seemed to relinquish command during his stay. Our childhood—myself and two siblings—was not really reminiscent of fatherly affection, but it is remembered with respect for authority and some post-appreciation for their commitment to each other...and to us.

I do not regret having gone into marriage without much of a base or experience in serious relationships. I have read that such inexperience can sometimes be for the better. But I do regret not having considered the past more maturely and wisely, because the past—and particularly childhood and family—have much bearing on the future marriage, relationships and family.

If not already apparent (in this chapter), the role of father and child is crucial to the role of husband and wife. The way that a wife views her husband—and men in general—is often through the lens of childhood experiences and relationships with her father, brother and other family.

My idea of marriage was largely fostered by what I experienced in my paternal family and what I learned from church family. Sure, I was aware of broken families, but I did not conceive or desire that for mine. She not only had to indulge the experiences of her childhood, but had somewhat of a repeat from a subsequent, step-father. Was it any wonder that she was desperate for this potential healthy relationship from her first love?

Wanting such a change for obvious reasons, she had to accept the untimely loss of her boyfriend with the bitterness that life is unfair; that she was robbed of the one family she thought she could acquire, but did not. Perhaps her on-again, off-again disposition was just cold-feet (as they say); but I think that it was the foreboding of marriage as tenuous—that whether by death of a dearly-beloved or by drunkenness of a dad, the relationship of marriage could not (and would not) last or endure.

I imagined myself as somewhat of the white knight – the rescuer if you will.

With only a brief introduction to this past experience, I imagined myself as somewhat of the white knight—the rescuer if you will. How often does the man enter the marriage with the same expectation—either from his perspective or from hers? He will be the exception; he will debunk all past impressions and experiences by showing her the “other side” of

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being a man. Yes, he will undo what has been undone—or he will die trying....

What a way to think—as though I could be the savior of anyone or anything? It's enough to set sail for the untested and untrained relationship; but to accept the mission that I could be anything and everything (they were not), is a call too high and impossible. To have such an expectation—from either perspective—is indeed a *design to fail*...for which the relationship of marriage could not (and would not) last or endure.

“Lifetime Lifting” is a good thing—for whom better to encourage our partner than ourselves. But this lifting must come from others too—and the absence of a decent father can not be substituted altogether by a husband or husband-intended, alive or dead. A knight perhaps; but the knight also has a brotherhood of alive and dead—and the history or legacy of the *fore-knight* has great bearing on the expectation and experience of the generations to come. Such a past cannot be an excuse for me or any other husband to fail as a husband, but it can be a significant reason for falling as a knight (from your mount). As the tried-and-true Proverbs offer from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson:

Pay close attention, friend, to what your father tells you;
never forget what you learned at your mother's knee. Wear
their counsel like flowers in your hair, like rings on your
fingers. (Chapter 1)

And for the legacy of our past sins and shortcomings, the book of Exodus offers:

Still, he doesn't ignore sin. He holds sons and grandsons responsible for a father's sins to the third and even fourth generation. (Chapter 34)

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Need I say more—that is not offered from the doctors and the deity—regarding the import of the father in the family? A good father establishes the basis for a good marriage of his child, and a bad father, a far less likely basis; neither is absolute, but one is far more associated with the other and, to the extreme of an addiction, “the other” is not. Even a good knight can fall to the rule or legacy of a bad king—but then there is often hope.

The on-again, off-again seemed to dissipate over time and, in time, we were engaged. There was the “first-time” of my inquiry (or proposal)—which *did not fly*; but “try, try again” with the battle-cry that soon rendered the momentary victory. Even before this commitment was initiated, I was ready for her to *meet the parents*.

We met at a local dinner theater; a place that my parents had attended many years prior when they were at the naval air station. This setting was very nice with reservations made for “My Fair Lady”; yet, reservations had also been expressed about the *rocky relationship*. The on-again off-again was concerning to my parents and my brother—both of whom thought that I should *give it a rest*. But like the independent son (or brother), I pressed-on with the thinking that *this too will pass*. By this time however, the roller-coaster had seemed to stop—and perhaps my parents were less concerned, as my dad prematurely introduced her as my fiancé. Maybe (to them) it was obvious that I had found a wife.

Plans were made and details were finalized; the wedding was to be at a local church where one of her sisters had been married. Neither of us had any prior association to the church; but on her impression and my acceptance, we proceeded with plans to attend there, to obtain some pre-marital counseling, and to be wed by the rector. Neither of us was aware or familiar with the

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church doctrine or theology, but I think the decision really *came-down* to the quaintness of the chapel—its ascetics and atmosphere.

The rector was a special man and friend; he offered a lot of encouragement and reassurance for both of us. Half listening to him and the other half mesmerized in matrimony, I was admittedly only *half-there*—the other half in love with loving someone and being loved by someone. It was altogether a wonderful time, a welcomed time and a wedding in the making of time.

Each of us came into this relationship with our own expectations and impressions formed by our backgrounds, our similarities and differences. On the surface, the similarities were our age, or state of birth, our social-economic status, and the church; but beneath the surface, was the differences described previously. Sometimes the differences can outweigh the similarities and the expectations and impressions can suffer.

As mentioned already, she was the youngest of six children; one brother and four sisters. Both of us being the youngest (of our families) may not be the best of similarities, but it could have given us opportunities and advantages: having the benefit of hindsight through the mistakes of older siblings should be one possibility for better, wiser decisions. Somewhat like the role of the father, these older ones can not only blaze the trail but can leave some trail-markers and maps to help those in the following. Some don't have this benefit or privilege, but we did.

Family gatherings usually went well on the basis of pleasing mom and tolerating the step-father. I mention this man once again because, besides being responsible (or irresponsible) for re-creating the addicted father-figure, he was exceptionally lazy and blatantly divisive. In looking back, I wonder how any—and particular the immediate family—could tolerate his presence save

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to make their mother happy, if that were possible. There was an occasional showing of good toward me—that I think it had more to do with where I came from, than who I was. In general, he made an occupation and objective out of denigrating the eldest brother-in-law—both he and his family. This “contribution” alone was enough reason to *send him packing*; but for reason (that no one seemed to understand or appreciate), their mother had married him...and tolerated him.

Her apparent dedication to marriage was (or should have been) commendable; she had suffered for many years in the first marriage and, if that wasn't enough, decided to *go at it* again. The first husband, Jesse, was purported as a hard worker and skilled machinist; but again, most or all of this information (for the little it was) came from the same brother-in-law maligned by the step-father. Other than the occasional comment, little or nothing was said of the first father; and nothing good was said of the present husband; and nothing commendable was seldom if ever said of any man in this family.

The brother-in-law was (and probably still is) a good man, husband and father; and though he had a story of his own, his faith made the difference. I always liked the man and depended on him on several occasions. As with the father of the family, this son-in-law was skilled in his own right. Not only did he help me (or my wife and me), but he also helped much of the family; yet, with all he did and then did, the thanks was scarce and the unwarranted criticism prevalent. If any man in that family could have been praised or recognized, he would have been (and should have been) the one. I guess it's true that no good deed goes unpunished.

Besides the modest mention of men, there was also some evidence that the addiction (alcoholism) was still present; though

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the step-father had been forced to *give it up* to save his life, three others (to include the one brother of the family) were developing or continuing in their own. Like his father, the brother was also skilled and, in the years prior to our meeting, had owned and managed his own business in shipboard maintenance. More than one story was told of why the business failed, but I believed the brother-in-law simply because of his continuing candor and credibility.

Another brother-in-law (with a similar problem) was also seemingly successful; and along with his wife, made enough income to propel them into a very comfortable lifestyle. He was considered a suitable husband at the time (in my recollection)—but would eventually precede me (by about a year) as another of the dispossessed and the divorced ex's. I mention the timing of their divorce to plant the possibility that divorce, like marriage, can be contagious.

He and I would not be alone however, as the only man that had any chance of surviving a marriage may have been the least worthy—that being the step-father. Anyone and everyone else was fair game and, whether they were better or worse than the first father, they were not of the same blood. Only the blood-brother was given grace when a marriage was *on the rocks*; and though the probable cause of his marriage break-up (s) was too many “on the rocks”, he could do no wrong in the eyes of his mother with or without the daughters' consent.

A description of the men (in this family) probably deserves more detail—and could probably benefit from one more qualified. What detail I mention is to make a single point: men were not respected and, though some probably deserved no respect, at least one did; still, nearly all suffered from the very deep hurt initiated by the father and undoubtedly continued by

the step-father. The sons, grandsons and all the men were held responsible for the sins of the father (and the step-father); and though the wife seemed to soldier-on, she was actually a participant in tolerating the first and patronizing the second.

As far as “Lifetime Lifting” or encouragement was concerned, the family (or children) was too embroiled in their own circumstances...carried over from the common childhood experience of an addictive parent. Without the love of a father, the obvious option is to depend on each other when they could. For the eldest child, a daughter, this meant becoming a surrogate mother; and while she and the good brother-in-law married young, they dually and dutifully *picked-up* some of the slack. This early effort of effectual parenting may have been part of the reason that they, among all the siblings and marriages, were the most stabile and the least seemingly damaged by the families’ experiences or past.

I may seem to be deviating from my initial intention, “a tone of encouragement”; but there is the need to be honest from the standpoint of my observations and experiences—especially as I think it may have pertained to or had bearing on our relationship, our marriage and family.

Did her experience as a child have some adverse effect...?

As I think back on this time period ranging from ten to twenty years ago, the possibility is that I have (or will) miss something; but at the same, I might not include something else. The objective in this recollection was chiefly to summarize my observations and experiences regarding the family and the men as it relates to the extended family and potentially to hers and mine.

Lifetime Lifting

Did her experience as a child have some adverse effect on the way that she thought about men; her impressions and expectations? Yes, I think it did. Did the father (and step-father) have some adverse effect on the way that the daughters (and son) live—particularly in their views and understanding of marriage and family? Yes, I think it did. Did the way that their mother lived (around her men) have some bearing on the way the daughters lived around their men? Again, I think it did.

My observations and experiences would be careless and unqualified to attempt to go further—and perhaps I have already gone too far. My basic understanding is that children are influenced by their parents—for good or bad—and will model some of their parents' behavior. Yes, there is potential opportunity to learn and to change—for the better—but the change does not come magically. Above all, the children or child (now adult) must sometimes painfully address (or redress) the practices of their parents with the aim of getting better.

Do I understand; have I experienced a family of addiction? No, I have not; and nor do I make an attempt to try to understand it with any follow-on. What I have said is part of my own journey to understand ultimately why I, as a husband, could never achieve the respect of my wife. But in the broader perspective is that no man had her respect—while none of the men of her immediate family had much, if any, either. If a man wants (and needs) to be respected, his chances were very small in this family—and if such was his way of being encouraged or gratified, than he could expect little if any....

Such an absence of this expression of encouragement left an obvious void; but the void did not necessarily remain, but was *back-filled* with something else. For my wife, this “something” could have included the basic belief that no man can (or

should) be respected; and in keeping with this experience, no man can be trusted—as reliability is not a reality. The on-again, off-again could not be casually assigned the condition of cold-feet, but was about the terror of committing herself to something that is not committable in her experience. “If I commit myself to him (like my mother did to her men), he will be like ‘her men’”, could be the deep sense from the mind of a young and very impressionable girl. Such a similar belief could have haunted some of the other girls—although they did not have to endure the brunt of a bad step-father.

On the eve of our marriage, there might have been good reason to really ask, “What is marriage?” Is it the impression and expectation that this man can make me happy—can be a savior that helps me forget the tragedy of my parents’ failed relationship as well as my own as his child? What is certain is that marriage was not to be a commitment or covenant.



Covenant Caring

When I speak of 'covenant', don't misunderstand me as having some above-it-all disposition; on the contrary, a covenant because of my belief in God's faithfulness...not hers or my own.

On the eve of our marriage, there might have been good reason to really ask, “What is marriage?” As untrained and untested as I was to relationships, the immediate ideal or concept of marriage was a lifetime of commitment. My idea of marriage was largely fostered by what I experienced in my paternal family and what I learned from church family. Sure, I was aware of broken families, but I did not conceive or desire that for mine. On the funny side of it, perhaps a dated commercial about men’s deodorant would be another way of expressing the idea: “...anything else would be uncivilized.”

Of course I was a relative babe when it came to marriage; but my conception or ideas had long been framed and formed in what was observed and experienced as a young person. Above everything, I observed commitment between my own parents and, however vague and distant, between their parents. Did I progressively learn of some of their own secrets or skeletons? Well, I believe that I did on some level; but above all, was the mutual sacrifices that framed and formed this commitment called

marriage. I cannot tell you that there was not some pain from any one or all of these families; but what I know is that, once married, always married.

If my explanation seems self-righteous, please forgive me; I accept that any marriage or pair of persons can not only be individually wrong, but can be doubly wrong in wedlock. Forget the so-called breed or class or creed; all of us are subject to our nature that essentially turns inward to ourselves and our own needs and wants. To think that two people can support “Lifetime-Lifting” and “Covenant-Caring” by themselves is not only unrealistic, but is becoming increasingly scarce in terms of even engagement—let alone the institution of marriage.

I have found these ideas of marriage is not limited to the Christian faith or to its origin in Judaism; but it transcends these faiths, and is even observed in some animal species. For the eagle, as an example, this one-lifetime mate seems to add the majesty of it—as though it not only flies or nests above the other flocks, but also embodies some human-like qualities of the sacredness and integrity of marriage and love. *Back on our feet or down-to-earth*, other religions embrace the similar sacredness and integrity; marriage continues to be a time-honored tradition, trait, or testimony of their faith and beliefs.

*Marriage
continues to be a
time-honored
tradition ...*

But I cannot ignore the exceptions or the failures of the institution either; *let's face it*, marriage has been under attack in our own society for years.

Covenant Caring

In his book, *Life without Father*, David Popenoe comments:

While the enormous increase in fatherlessness over the past three decades stems mainly from the two factors of divorce and non-marital births, a single phenomenon underlies them both: a decline in the institution of marriage. (23)

Other “Reserved References” describe this institution in decline in the context of the father’s diminishing value and virtue in our society; that the decline of marriage is due to the dual effect of societal changes. David Blankenhorn offers the broader assessment in his book, *Fatherless America*:

As the social role for fathers has diminished, so our cultural story of fatherhood has by now almost completely ceased to portray fathers as essential guarantors of child and societal well-being. Not to be overly gloomy, but in some respects it has been all downhill for fathers since the Industrial Revolution. (2)

You cannot begin to understand the failure of marriage—or the living of these ideas commitment or covenant—without considering and factoring in the devaluing of fatherhood. The two are inextricably linked and dependent.

Addressing marriage as a covenant may seem too high-minded or naïve considering the present and the bleak condition of marriage in the first place; but my decision is on the basic premise that it was my understanding—and I had accepted marriage as such. Marriage is still a sacred covenant—as it must be in order for the family, and in turn or society, to remain intact.

This concept of a covenant never really came-up in conversation (as I recall); but it was understood by virtue of the vows (or expressed promises before God and man). Because a covenant—or binding promise—was understood in the context of

Biblical teaching, my inclination was always to consider the examples therein.

God made a promise (with Noah) not to flood the earth again; and though there has been some regional flooding, “the earth” or land has not fallen under water again. God made a promise to Abraham; and though childless and beyond child-bearing age, he would have descendents in abundance. As by definition as well as by history’s account, this kind of promise was to endure for all generations, as the Psalmist tells us in *The Message*: “And he remembers, remembers his Covenant—for a thousand generations he’s been as good as his word.” (chapter 105) God the creator is faithful, though man the created is not.

How then can a covenant have any application to or assurance of a marriage, a commitment? If man has proven that he cannot be faithful or trusting, then what’s the point of considering or applying these ideas of a covenant? In my simple mind, it’s about considering and applying something that is bigger and better than each and both of us; it’s about *the bigger picture* that marriage was made for man—and not man for marriage. If man was made for marriage, than all men would marry and all marriages would be subject to the certain, inevitable failure of those who formed them. As it was however, God established this union, this relationship and this institution to be somewhat of a representation of his son’s relationship to man (as described in the New Testament)—of the messiah to his marriage bride, the church.

What is magnificent and miraculous about marriage (in this context) is that, just as we are taken individually as imperfect before God, marriage is designed to take imperfection and join it into a perfectly formed institution. A marriage is not perfect but,

Covenant Caring

ideally, continues in that direction becoming more similar to the comparative relationship of Christ to his true church. Though it seems idealistic—or even impossible—God made marriage for man alone and designed marriage to be between male and female. All exceptions or alternations to this course, as even included in the Bible such as Leviticus, are the result of man’s imperfections and attempts to *make God* rather than to accept as *being God-made*. I think we sometimes reverse our relationship with God.

Marriage, with all its failures, is a manifestation of this reversal in relationship. The legal community, as marriage licenses are acquired, is a prime example of where the institution is devalued beyond the worth of the paper or processing. Unlike a contract—which is actually of lower intrinsic value than a covenant—a marriage license has virtually no clout or power in divorce court. With the addendum of a pre-nuptial agreement (or contract), the institution can be elevated to some status; but alone, a marriage license is worthless before or beyond divorce in a “civil” court.

*The legal
community...
devalued
(marriage)
beyond...*

For one who has been through divorce as a defendant, I have witnessed this treatment of the institution under license. It seems to me that other licenses are revoked or cancelled when the holder has been found to have violated the terms or conditions—somewhat like a contract. But with a marriage, there are no such terms or conditions that I’m aware of; thus, the opportunity or condition for nullifying the license can be over the expressed unhappiness of the plaintiff— regardless of what the other holder (or defendant) has or has not done. No terms, no conditions, no promises, no commitment, and no institution—but

only another example of what happens when law and politics attempt to regulate a religious institution. *A far cry* from a covenant, marriage has been the victim in part because of a government that treats it as something less than a contract and nothing more than the privilege to drive, hunt and fish, if that!

As the process is often played out, an intended couple will acquire the obligatory license and have some form of ceremony to include the exchange of vows. A vow or vows is, by definition, a solemn promise or statement; or one in which a person is sworn to an act, service or condition. Though the license is merely a legal transaction, the vows or ceremony is intended to be the essence of this arrangement, this institution.

As I peruse the dictionary for the definition of a “vow”, the word “voucher” *came across*; and reading the definition out of vague curiosity, the analogy to a marriage license was striking. A voucher can be described as: a written affidavit or authorization, or a documentary record of a business transaction. A marriage license is really a voucher in that it is only a business transaction—and can be as illusive and unsupportable as an affidavit.

In the matter of divorce, I have also been the defendant of a testimony or an affidavit. Sworn testimony may be acceptable to the legal community as the truth; but in my assessment, it is no more than a license (or voucher) to lie. She may say that you did *this or that* or that you could do *this or that*; but what is said is never validated by the courts or judge. What is testimony in the form of an affidavit becomes more than *de facto*. Yes, an affidavit is like a marriage license; in that both are vouchers, both can render the defense defenseless, and both can be no more than a business transaction.

Covenant Caring

Divorce is big business. The legal system can make a marriage...and it can break it. Law firms have been borne out of the ashes of the institution of marriage, and have made this lot filthy rich. Under the arbitrary auspices of a duty to society, this profession has profited on the institution of marriage and its demise.

The legal system can make a marriage, and it can break it.

In some remote recesses of my reminiscence is an ailing hooped animal that, being largely defenseless, is surrounded by jackals; and after they have made the kill and consumed their fill, the vultures arrive to peck at bones. Collectively, these scavengers are simply helping nature by *thinning the breed*—unless of course you're one of the ailing...or one of the breed.

As the authors of *Defusing the High-Conflict Divorce* describe:

It may, for some attorneys, be more comfortable to deal with a parent who is righteously angry rather than a miserable and depressed client who is struggling to cope with the many facets of loss and anxiety generated by divorce.... (122)

I do not believe my reminiscence is *too far off*. Oh sure, the jackals (or *wolves*) often dress themselves in the finery of *sheep's clothing*, but any of *the breed* befit for consumption (namely, the non-custodial) soon befall the bloodletting of their brood. Such an act is beyond our *best nature*; it is a brutal assault on the family—the innocent and those who maintain that the brood is worth saving.

If I could take my reminiscence (of attorneys) beyond the remote, perhaps I could find some good; for example, the family court attorney who pled for reconciliation with my alienated children. Again, according to the same reference (*Defusing the*

High-Conflict Divorce), the obvious is that “the attorney’s role is to look out for the best interest of their client.” Unlike for the family court attorney, “the client” is not the children; thus, from the same reference, “he (the attorney) may take either approach with little regard for the potential impact to the children.” (122)

In all the collective criticism of the law firms (or court system), I am not suggesting that the law (courts, firms, systems) is purposely disposed on destroying marriage; but I do believe that it (the law) is not capable of managing marriage and its aftermath. The law is itself an institution made-up of imperfect people. In a simple way of considering *The System*, I apply the 3-Rs of the courts: Re-election for the judges; Retainers for the attorneys; and Retirement for the balance. These attorneys don’t care what or who is at stake; but they are keen on *having a stake*. They present their services with all the promises of tomorrow...and all the privilege of *carving-up the spoils* today. It is the basic *survival of the fittest* and then the vulnerable, the ailing, the one and his children.

When the law so intimately governs these matters, it is too late; or when one or more parents abdicate their authority of (and responsibility for) their children, it is *too bad*. Having (or inviting) such involvement and authority can be expressed by a phrase I’m familiar with: “designed to fail”. When an intended covenant is reduced from a vow to a voucher, then marriage (and family) is virtually quashed while the courts mediate *The Mess*...leaving the children in the wake of the aftermath of less-than-promised conditions.

Covenant Caring

In the classic study of children of divorce (1990's), *Second Chances*, the writers conclude:

Divorce is deceptive. Legally it is a single event, but psychologically it is a chain—sometimes a never ending chain—of events, relocations, and radically shifting relationships strung through time, a process that forever changes the lives of the people involved. (Introduction)

In this groundbreaking study (1980's), the authors of *Second Chances* postulate that divorce hurts children throughout their childhood and adolescent years...and often into adulthood. Referencing these findings, further commentary in *Defusing the High-Conflict Divorce* supports these conclusions: “The simple answer is that indeed everyone suffers in a divorce. “ (11) “Everyone” means the family, of course; but not the courts. I say again that “divorce is big business”; it is so big that it deserves more discussion.

In all my business dealings, I can not recall such a rule (or ruse) of the attorney's retainer. Paid in advance, the attorney often conducts his services without any disclosure of billed time and without any pre-determination of expectation or outcome. To consider non-disclosed billing to be a forgone conclusion, consider the later (or the services). Maybe my choice (in attorneys, etc.), my disposition or any number of other variables; but I often feel or sense that my so-called attorney is not really helping me—or even wanting to! I know that if someone handed me a check before rendering services, that motivation would definitely *take a hit*. If I could defer the payment, maybe the *dangling carrot* would render some caring; maybe if he (or she) yelled repeatedly, “Show me the money”, we could establish an

understanding. But as been my experience, service is incidental with foremost is that: “It’s about my economy, stupid.”

If commitment is lacking in marriage, it is also lacking in the so-called “client” relationship; far more often than not, attorney’s just don’t offer anything of the *warm and fuzzy* variety. Phone calls are ineffective in terms of substantive conversation; writing is probably disregarded because it’s written in common English; and face-to-face meetings are *hurry-up and wait*. Realizing that “the firm” is somewhat supported by “the state”, is it any wonder why the attorney might be caught in allegiance between the courts and the client? In the matter of a public defender, allegiance is clearly understood (as to *The State*); but when the attorney is retained, well, what then?

Perhaps the most evident show of commitment is between

...troubling is
“The League” of
the court
system...

the attorney and the judge; a commitment that is awarded by virtue of the judge’s authority and position—and the commitment most often preferred over contempt or contentiousness. What is particularly troubling is “The League” of the court system: the implied if not apparent relationship

between these “regulars” that makes a “one-timer” (like me) as incidental as the so-called client relationship. The judge may speak to me; she may recite such standard questions as: “Do you speak English?” or “Do you understand the verdict of this court?” Of which, I must respectfully reply: “Yes, I do speak English...”; “...No, I will never be able to understand...”

“The League” does understand however, as they are all a piece or subsystem of *The System* that mediates *The Mess*. They *can* make substantive phone calls, they *can* write in the acceptable

Covenant Caring

jargon, and they generally operate under the *rule of expediency*—where the defense is on *the wrong side of the fence* (and the prosecution is not).

“The League” has a predominant dependence on itself; thus, the same participants who *go-at-it* in the court by day may have drinks at their favorite place by night; or for those who enjoy a round of golf, the same goes.... With this possible if not very real relationship, comes even further lapse in the potential of the *warm and fuzzy* variety; especially, when the two (or more of “The League”) address each other on a first name basis or enjoy a moment of cajoling or casual conversation—while you wait for *the rest of your life* to come to order, if that were possible.

Retainers of my giving are probably *small change*; thus, I presumably get what I pay for...which is not much. In actuality, I have had one or two good attorneys—who happened to be women. For one of the two, excellence may have come from her former profession as a nurse. Outside of these experiences and observations, I have not been impressed; but on the contrary, loath the very thought of legal services. Maybe it’s all those “variables”; but I am tired of defending my marriage, my fatherhood and myself among those who simply do not care—and never will care except for *a league of their own*.

With all the commitment in this professional league—and the lack of commitment to marriage—the *end-game* is indeed *survival of the fittest*. How long will the herd survive, is the bigger issue? With commitment waning in the one institution (of marriage), but apparently strong among “The League” (in terms of growth in number and financial health), what will happen (or is happening) to the herd? The seemingly-endless “reserved resources” (used in my book) describe the bleak situation and circumstance.

A Once and Always Father

Divorce may have stabilized or even slightly decreased per capita; but marriage is on the decline...as is fatherhood or paternal participation. As David Popenoe writes under the subtitle “Fatherhood in Contemporary Culture” of *Life without Father*:

One of the principal social functions of marriage is to hold men to the mother-child bond. For men everywhere, marriage and parenthood are a package deal. In downgrading marriage, men will get the message that they are no longer needed, or even wanted, in family life. (48)

Again, “the two are inextricably linked and dependent”—when one fails, so too the other.

Let me clarify that I am not attempting to condemn or to criticize the many single-parent homes where one or the other has been forced to a single-parent role; or where abandonment or abuse were truly cause for a radical change and the consequence of single-parenting. What I am trying to present is the condition where the one institution is systematically supporting the demise of the other—or where the families that can (or could) survive are being duped into divorce with empty promises, empty pockets, and empty hearts.

“Covenant Caring” is about a promise; a promise that, in my belief, involves one male, one female and one God. My realistic impression is that these two persons are imperfect, but God is not. My expectation is that God, in his perfection can bound imperfection in love—which can yield “Lifetime-Lifting”, commitment and a time-honored covenant. Call it an idea or concept, but this belief is where I began my marriage, and refuse to dismiss it following my divorce.



Gondola Grand

In retrospect, I have confessed that I was not a good steward – but joined the ranks of the “DINKS” want-to-be. Still, finances (or problems) did not always coincide with our differences; but it was more about control and commitment.

Learning of a divorce as both a participant and a concerned party has evoked the repeated, basic question, “Why?” Responding to the question (as a participant) has not been easy for me because, as I have already conveyed in large part, the divorce was not justified in my mind. Words such as commitment, covenant, and caring have been used frequently as the indicators of what marriage is...or should be. In the mystic relationship or correlation between what the public wants and the courts offer, divorce has simply been made easier (to process)—though without much if any solace for the family that invariably suffers.

Among the chief causes of divorce is money or finances. The pressures of debt and the obligations of the family finances are clearly causes for problems; but I do accept that such was, in our case, the cause or justification for divorce. On the contrary, divorce (as a process) ushered us into the highest debt status due to the withdrawal of large sums from a line-of-credit or second mortgage account. Given that my ex-wife was (or is) an

accountant, the excuse of ignorance cannot be used in these transactions; but could be instead, one “calculated move” in the master plan of *The Mess*. In the months leading-up to her divorce, she borrowed (or withdrew) in excess of ten thousand dollars from these accounts presumably for living at large and for legal retainers. Following the divorce, I was charged with the liability for much of this debt.

“Gondola Grand” is largely about money and finances during the history of our marriage; but there will be some related commentary to discount the possibility of finances (or financial problems) being the cause for divorce. What is certain is that the relatively large degree of debt that she accumulated for the divorce was ultimately (and purposely) levied on me as part of the divorce judgment.

This amount, totaling over \$11,000 in final figures would be only a portion of the monetary “mess” that oozed out of the judgment and post-divorce proceedings. Besides this financing, I was obligated for child support, a joint-loan on a car, the individual mortgage, life insurance policies, health insurance for the children to include uninsured medical costs, and the unexpected tax liability resulting from an M-6 to an S-1 status on the W-4. Before addressing each and all of these items in some

Besides the mounting financial problems...

measure however, I began a brief detour down *the road of depression*.

Besides the mounting financial problems, the basic loss of my family was devastating for me. If I had to deal with the personal loss (and not financial loss), it was too much. During the months prior to and years following divorce, I was (and continue to be) affected in an adverse way. To repeat the conclusion from

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the book entitled *Defusing the High-Conflict Divorce*, "...indeed everyone suffers in a divorce. "

Looking back, and knowing or realizing my emotional health at the time, I should have gotten more help or counseling. I did enroll in the basic post-divorce counseling, as required, and even followed with the secondary course that lasted a period of months—but it was just not enough. I felt as close to death as I probably ever have. I was desperate to be sure.

In such a frame of mind or emotion, I prodded-on—perhaps relying on the prayers of family and friends who had supported me during the process...and remained concerned consequently. I cannot say enough about such support during the time except that, in general, it could have meant the difference between life and death in this world. Months of sleepless nights and incessant conversation (with myself) was immensely fatiguing. These late night and early conversations were a recurring review of the case and conditions that never came to terms with any answers for the question, "Why?" On the basic understanding of cause-and-effect, I could tell myself that she was wrong and that the children would surely suffer; but maybe I was to suffer for them.

In the book, *Second Chances*, the authors devote an entire chapter to the subject (or assessment) of "winners and losers" of divorce; and with the study spanning over ten years at the time (and twenty five years in total), the assessment was conducted periodically.

On the matter of “the decision” of divorce, they write:

In families with children, divorce is rarely a mutual decision. One person wants out while the other person goes along reluctantly or opposes it moderately or vigorously. In our study, 65 percent of the women and 35 percent of the men actively sought to end the marriage in the face of opposition. Only one couple decided to divorce by truly mutual agreement. (Introduction)

Thus, while everyone in the family suffers (post-divorce), the intention may be that that only one will (or will not) ultimately suffer.

In my experience—that is approaching a decade as of 2010—I can attest that everyone has suffered; but also, as may be evident from above, that one (of the family) had *bought into* the notion of post-marriage happiness. As one fellow put it so wryly, “Hey, if she isn’t happy; that’s a personal problem”—to suggest or affirm that happiness is not the complete responsibility of another. As I write this very paragraph, she is not happy—and I wonder if she will ever be....

So she attempted to buy her happiness and she purposely made me pay for it in one way and another. Finances can be a real problem in marriage...and after marriage. For me, this change of family meant: moving in with paternal family while the house was signed-over to her in a *quit deed*; incurring the debt already mentioned; resigning the paid-off vehicle to her; not yet even considering the monumental tax liability waiting to explode the following April. Yes, I was dumb, but sometimes the spouse (and parent) who opposes the divorce, will do so with mercy.

Long before my divorce, I had heard in passing of the “Deadbeat Dad”; the ex-husband and/or father who has refused or shirked his responsibility for alimony or child support. I did

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not really consider the designation; I just simply went-on without an opinion one way or the other. If I was forced to draw an opinion or come to some conclusion, it would have been that they deserve what they get whether it is isolation from their family or incarceration for arrears. I never considered the possibility that something deeper was at stake; and that they might have a solid, legitimate cause for not paying—or being able to pay. In *Fatherless America*, Blankenhorn devotes much commentary on the subject (or designation). He makes the following distinction:

The Deadbeat Dad has emerged as our principal cultural model for ex-fathers, for obviously failed fathers. As a cultural category, the Deadbeat Dad has become our primary symbol of the growing failure of fatherhood in our society... Consequently, we vilify him, we threaten him—we demand that he pay—largely because he so clearly embodies the contemporary collapse of good-enough fatherhood. (46)

Yet the content of our demand illustrates both the depth of our pessimism and the lowering of our standards. We do not ask this guy to be a father. That would be utopian, impossible. We ask him to send a check. Instead of demanding what is owed, we demand money. (127)

Like divorce, child-support enforcement is big business. Since the establishment of a federal office in the 1970's, child enforcement has become nationalized with federal and state officials. James Johnston, writer for shared-parenting magazine, *The Liberator*, describes this nationally-based policy as the brainchild of Dr. Robert Williams. From his 2007 article, "Dr. Robert Williams and his 'income-shared' child support model", Mr. Johnson writes:

... *child-support... is big business.*

A Once and Always Father

Deemed the “father” of the current system, Williams “established himself as a chief consultant to the agency responsible for child support policy, and successfully manipulated his personal approach to the subject into nation-wide laws, and a huge personal fortune.”

He concludes (with understood cynicism):

Thanks to this crazy social experiment we have increased juvenile suicide, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, and teenage drug abuse. All of these ills share (most of the time) a common variable: an absent parent....

One of my favorite politicians (a medical doctor) says: “anything the government subsidizes—you get more of it....” Once again, an institution—not so far from “The League” already described—has joined forces to solve the marital problems of families. I will *shelve* this matter for now, but will return again as necessary in describing “the divorce industry”.

My attention to child support (enforcement) and, in the bigger issue, the “Grand” or finances of divorce and its aftermath, is not in anyway to minimize the importance of financially supporting your family. To be insensitive to their (children and family) financial needs would be to not care...to not love them...and to not be what they deserve from a parent and caretaker. My grief is not with the responsibility of this *piece of parenting*, but is with a system by which the regulating community has profited while divorce and its devastation have proliferated; and of course, with the personal experience that my role has been reduced to a debtor—when what I want to be (and have always wanted to be) is a dad.

From the beginning of our marriage, the “Grand” or finances were periodically an issue and sometimes more. When

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we married, I learned that she had several thousand dollars of credit card debt—which we promptly paid off. During the fourteen years of marriage, I was laid-off two times—and this too created some problems. But with these issues and problems, we seemed to work together and, from such concerns, could have grown or matured—though such is sometimes a matter of perspective and post-assessment.

During the longest period of unemployment (that lasted about six months), we received an outpouring of help from our church and from others in the community. An older, semi-retired couple let us live in their house for several months, while the church brought us a windfall of groceries. Having two children at the time, the blessings were many—and this alone would remind me that love can glow (and grow) when conditions are sometimes dark and dismal. Sometimes the “dark and dismal” can result for good, for a good purpose.

Our first purchase of marriage property was conceptually a good idea. Living in Savannah, we bought an old house that was a fixer-upper. Set on a square in a community called Ardsley Park, it was pristine and vintage. Shortly after we moved in, we learned that a movie had been filmed next door; and that Winona Ryder had shimmied-down a chalice to slip away in a VW Van. For anyone who knows Savannah, such trivia was nothing spectacular; but for us, the house was....

On the idea that we could re-model with some real sweat-equity, we embarked on the adventure of do-it-yourself. The trouble however, was that we were semi-skilled—and probably too young and excited to know it. *Where there is a will, there is a way*; better to do-it-yourself than pay, and so we did.

Less than a year later, we were expecting our first child, and at roughly the same time, she lost her job. With this set of

circumstances, she moved back to Florida and I stayed-on to get the house in final shape for sell. It was never my intention to ready-the-house in such a short time period; but then, I did not anticipate the loss of job and the magnitude and difficulty of selling the house. In short, we probably made a bad decision...for which we would pay.

As hindsight is so often clear, the experience was altogether not a good one. The house was too much for us; and though the concept seemed reasonable, it was not well-planned or assessed. During this time, my stewardship as far as tithing had dwindled; and, quite frankly, I was becoming a DINK (Duel-Income-No-Children) want-to-be—with some drive to *keep-up with the Jones*. The house was nice, but the purchase was not a good one. I

*...in the mind
or heart of my
wife, all roads
ended at the
state line...*

never regretted moving from Florida and taking the charm and beauty of the Low Country, but I have often regretted purchasing that house.

What I was also not aware of is that, in the mind or heart of my wife, all roads ended at the state line (of Florida); or more specifically, she was a dyed-in-the-wool homebody who truly had not wanted to leave Jacksonville. Not once but twice, I made attempts to move north—all the way to Georgia—and both times, she would go back against the flow of the St. Johns River. To clarify the saying, “nobody’s happy if momma isn’t happy”, the corrected saying in my experience is: “she isn’t happy if momma isn’t happy.” Yes, she was still attached to her mother and could not *let go*—in spite of the fact that she despised some of her mother’s ways.

All those years in living with an addiction (the father) has got to either *make-you or break-you*; the addiction, the absence, and the

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abuse must take a toll on anyone and anything related to people, to families and children. In some counseling and correlated reading, I have come to believe that survival seems to be largely about either living *around it* or, to the extreme, getting rid of it. For this family, they somehow lived *around it*. With the uncertainty of the second parent, the first (parent) must take *command and control* for the survival of the family. This condition can be applied to a team, an organization: when the leader does not lead, someone must....

And so she did; working full-time and parenting the rest of the time, she made a way to survive. Yes, she had help from the church—as we did—but she had to do it not only without him—but more accurately, against him! With such a decision or lifestyle, how is the other parent treated? I don't know altogether because I was not there and I have *never been there*; but what I do know is that she took control and would not let go. She took control of him (as possible), she took control of them (the children), and she took control of the “second him” too (or the second husband).

When the “second him” stopped drinking, he stopped working too—but she did not seem to mind, as she kept working as always. When the children (mostly adults by this time) murmured criticism about this “second him” not working and such, she was quick to protect and defend him. When the “second him” was so divisive by criticizing the “good brother-in-law” among others, she did not seem to mind; but when he decided to exercise some semblance of authority on a rare occasion, she did much more than mind. Yes, on the rare occasion when he seemed to be morphing into a man, her tolerance met its match. Once *command and control* was taken as

the role, it would not relent to him—whoever the “him” happened to be.

Command and control can sometimes be subtle: it can wear a hat of humility over a helmet of honed hardness; it can greet with a smile and shake on the one hand; but hold a death-grip with grinding and seething underneath it; and it can use self-loathing and pity as the means to metastasize the made-guilty. These methods must have been learned by her, and I’m convinced, by at least one of them too (the children, now mostly adults).

Finances (or problems) did not always coincide with our differences; but it was more about control and commitment. Control could potentially operate in the subtle form, but if that didn’t work, then more overt outpourings were the course. To move back to Florida the first time was acceptable: she was jobless and expecting our first child, and I thought the move back as beneficial to her and to us; but the second and third time were too much. For her, this continued practice was about *command and control*—about carrying-out the time-honored tradition for the survival of the family. Taking an adage of the time-honored tradition with attention to the locality, I guess it’s true that *the orange falls close to the tree*.

A “Gondola” is not really a boat or other transport vehicle. My use of the word is to represent something big—something very big—which comes from a childhood account where a big nose was nicknamed a “gondola”. The “Grand” or finances were an issue and sometimes more; but the post-marriage issues were a “Gondola”! *Command and control* was the apparent cause however; and the finances were simply the effect and result. This control was manifest in two returns (or flights) to Florida; where even following the second, she returned to our home in Georgia ostensibly to *patch things up*...again.

Gondola Grand

I do not think that *command and control* was alone as the probable cause for a few flights, but it was joined by fear. Maybe you can imagine the dread of daddy's return home, but I cannot. Somewhere in this arrangement, fear must have lurked along side of *command and control*. Maybe the fear was the sense of being out-of-control or losing control; I don't know altogether, but believe that fear was near...as was control.

Fear is not something that I know beyond my own experience; in other words, I am not educated in the science or subject of fear. I have read and observed that fear can render a powerful force: it can turn a small-framed female into a *force-de-tour*; and it can render the best—with the natural instinct to protect and defend—or the worst in us. Fear and control can do much for us and it can do much to us...and to them too.



Maze Minding

Even before the arrival of our first child, the roles and responsibilities were changing—and though the decision of children was a mutual decision—I wondered if we were really ready and that she would ever be....

When you have no children in marriage, an old fixer-upper (referring to the house in Savannah) may be the challenge or objective; but when children come along, things change...lots of things.

She had married with the expressed intention of being an accountant; a CPA with a firm. In less than two years after marriage, she had accomplished this objective and was working for a local, reputable firm. She was *on her way*.

Less than a year after that, we moved from Florida to Savannah. With minimal sacrifice—it seemed—she was able to continue her profession though roughly 120 miles from her former position (or home). But miles is not so much the issue, nor the change from one firm to another; but the real sacrifice would prove to be moving from home, from her family and in particular, her mother.

Moving to Savannah seemed like a great idea. We found a church and began to develop several friends through church and job. Living for six months in an apartment, we were able to save

and purchase an old house in a fine neighborhood. We enjoyed bike rides, a few trips to the beach and South Carolina, and the general charm of that town. The new home seemed to be good.

When she lost her job, she was devastated. Though I had not lost a job (yet), I would...a few years later. I know what it's like to lose a job. But I also know what it's like to be arrested at work, escorted off to jail and terminated for absenteeism while you wait in jail for a hearing. Yes, I know what it's like to lose your job because you are trying to help your children.

*...we both had
little experience
in the caring of
children...*

But in her loss (of job) was the good news of our pregnancy. We had not really talked about children before marriage, but positive influence from other church families gave reason to try—and so we did...and it did...and he did.

His name was “Matthew”. After finding out about her pregnancy, I could not have been more excited with both anticipation and the possible experience of being a parent. Like marriage though, we both had little experience in the caring for children—being the youngest in each family—and were clearly heading down an un-cleared *road* called parenthood. Even before the arrival of our first child, the roles and responsibilities were changing; and though the decision was mutual, I wondered if we were really ready.

In the months to follow, she elected to return to Florida while I stayed-on to try to finish the house and put it on the market for sell. This was a particularly tough time financially and, though she had found employment in Florida, we were trying to support two households. Marketing the house

Maze Minding

continued (and would continue on), and I returned to Florida after finding employment there.

I was glad to be back with her, and excited about sharing in the last days of the pregnancy; but I was also worried about the house. We had done much—as much as we thought we could—to prepare the house for market and now, as an alternative, we were renting it. As first time “landlords”, we had to experience late and delinquent payments, than no payments, and than magistrates’ court for eviction...and a mess.

This house, from sell to rent to a *quit deed lieu*, was a mess indeed; but it was perhaps preparation for what would come—as past experiences can help prepare or condition us for the future. This house had become a mess to be sure, but would pale in comparison to divorce and its aftermath—which I call *The Mess*...with a capital “M”. If *The Mess* was an iceberg, the house would have been an ice-cube. Need I say more? Yes, I have...and I will....

“Maze Minding” is not exclusive of “Lifetime Lifting” or “Covenant Caring”...or even “Gondola Grand”, but it involves all three: this term of “Maze Minding” is about making choices, decisions and directions; not always the right one, mind you, but ideally making these decisions together—and not alone or in opposition. It is about making these decisions together, in unity and with shared responsibility—though sometimes as a leader...and other times as the follower.

We did make a decision to do a *quit deed lieu* as an alternative to foreclosure. Even with the premature sell (or loss) of the house, we had each other and we had a child. Yes, the decision was not favorable—although it was more a matter of the term or length of ownership than anything else.

Families and individual mortgage owners experience problems; as I write, our nation is experiencing an unprecedented number of failures or foreclosures—and it could get worse! Thus, I do not consider the matter of the *quite deed lieu* as a lifelong failure. I will not look back on this failure with such regret because the intention was good—which most of all, was to purchase a house that my wife liked and

Making decisions is sometimes very hard and very risky...

I thought could appreciate for the years to come.

Having a child was another example of “Maze Minding”. Yes, we were influenced by others; but how often do such influences occur in the decision to have children? It is just natural and with good intentions. Even natural and with good intentions, she may not have really wanted children, or she may have not really wanted to move away to Georgia. Yet, she did move away and, at times, seemed excited despite the lurking problems with the house and the subtle phobia of living too far away from family.

Making decisions is sometimes very hard and very risky—don’t you agree? If not hard enough making some of these for ourselves, it is even harder and more risky making them for others. It seems that whether with the move or other serious matters, that when things *went south*, the risks rose to the occasion and good intentions were punished. To move was adventurous until the loss of the job; and the house was exciting until it would not sell; and the child was wonderful until those late nights and other demands of parenting. If you embrace the decision and its profits, than shouldn’t you also accept the outcome and its losses, setback or sacrifices? Yes, it’s all part of “Maze Minding”.

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These decisions and directions are part of our careers, part of personal lives and part of our spiritual lives. As taught, the spiritual is supposed to guide the personal and professional; but when the first does not direct the second or third, there may be added trouble. On the other hand, trouble is not exclusive to this arrangement—as trouble can come to anyone at anytime—even if they have not earned it, so to speak. It's not so much about judging the matter on whether it was “his fault” or “her fault” or “their fault”; but it is about dealing with “the fault”, trouble or risks. When one begins to hold the other responsible for the bad times or difficulties, the other begins to wonder and question, “Why?”

Part of our preparation during pregnancy was birthing classes; and this was a time of good intentions as well as good participation on the part of both. The plan to actually “be there” and to participate was an unforgettable and beautiful experience. I was present for all four of my children and would not have wanted it any other way. To witness each is unforgettable and the most spectacular of miracles. I know, it's just a baby and a birth, but I cannot get over the basic observation of witnessing this tiny being—this helpless, crying and tiny human being.

Our first baby was very difficult; and after many hours of breathing with minimal dilation, she was subjected to what I describe as a large suction cup. Quickly moving me out of the way, a team piled into the room, flanked my wife, and began pushing her stomach while he pulled with this device. To tell you the truth, I wonder how she (and child) survived all the momentary pressure. But within what seemed like seconds, Matthew was born.

Our child was in *fine form*, but “mom” was exhausted; she had probably incurred a chipped vertebra during the last of this

delivery and some significant tearing with the push-and-pull pressure. With nearly a day from check-in until delivery, she needed much time for rest and recovery. For the new parents, rest would become a much sought after and sometimes deficient want or necessity. Matthew was not a sleeper and, in my recollection, neither were any of our four children. Benjamin,

*...I felt
compelled to try
to advance ...*

the third of the four, was riddled with a recurring ear infection. Both he and our daughter had Strabismus—or an eye deviation that required surgery. Brian-Wesley, the youngest, had to have his adenoids removed. Aside from these medical problems, the demands of raising children and of parenting seemed never ending at times. Life had changed, roles had changed and we were changing too.

Matthew (Matt) did not necessarily sleep and, though healthy by all indication, was subject to his two hour naps and a lot of rocking whether by cradle or chair. Not to sell the prospective parent on such modern devices, but this automatic cradle was a lifesaver. Laying him in and cranking it up, he might sleep for some length or hum before nodding off. Matt would seemingly sing himself to sleep.

We had much to learn and, though reading the book, *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, I was but a babe when it came to caring for babes. Still, the modern conveniences of disposal diapers and wipes, disposal inner-bag bottles, and a variety of other necessary and optional items put me in contention for the next grade—and maybe even a promotion.

Perhaps the demands of parenting and the pressures of the house (in Savannah) had some significant change on our lives; so much so, that arguments and contention began to surface and re-

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surface in our relationship. During the early stages of this contention, I suggested that we get counseling—but she refused. She most likely confided in family—and a friend or two—but did not want to consider counseling at that time for unexpressed reasons.

As the primary income earner during this time, I felt compelled to try to advance my career or make more income, as possible. During the years of child-bearing, she worked; but most of the time it was for our church as a bookkeeper with less income than before. It was a demanding situation for her however; as I worked full-time, went to school at night, and eventually taught as an adjunct instructor. Our lives became very demanding and taxed.

In *looking back*, and perhaps anticipating what some of the readers might be thinking, “Why have children; why four children?” It is a good question, and one that I have not quite found a complete answer for; except to say that it was what we did because we could...and because we thought that having children was a blessing and an overall benefit. What is important in this belief is the word “we”; but what remains indefinite or uncertain is whether “we” truly shared this thought. Yes, it was demanding and we were taxed; and we began to fight and have contention rather than general cohesion in our relationship; but my feeling was sometimes what others would say in the demands of life: *this too will pass*.

Eventually, these demands *did pass*: first, the children got through their irregular sleeping patterns, and individual and common illnesses; second, they began to crawl, walk and run; and third, I began to take them on Saturdays or the weekends to give her time to re-cooperate. We (the children and I) would go to the park, go walking, go to a nature trail, go to a nearby church

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and play by the river, go to a museum and go to the beach. In those early years, we traveled from the old fort in Fernandina to the old fort in St. Augustine and everywhere in between. When Matt turned six, we enrolled him in cub scouting and, with our other kids, would pile into the old van and go to his events. Matt in scouting and the others in tow, our day trips and occasional overnights became routine. At the same time, my parents began to help by taking the kids up to Alabama for a week or two. Before they entered school programs and during breaks and summers, this arrangement was possible...and often planned and carried-out. Finally, there was her mother and a friend that also offered care and support. In the later relationship, her friend was a true blessing—as she helped with some of that “Lifetime Lifting”.

The first baby was our experiment, the second was a surprise, the third was planned, and the last slipped-in right behind him. It sounds rather simple (and serial) but, of course, it was not...that simple. On the contrary, it seemed impossible in moments, tolerable at times, and accommodating because it was acceptable and appropriate. My wife worked hard—as mother’s can—but she had lots of help and support too.

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For someone who is new at a job or vocation, the duties can involve the dilemma between needing help and wanting no help; if offered help, you may not accept it—or accept it with gratitude. You may want help, but you may not want too much help. Call it pride or call it determination, but it still works out to be a dilemma. To complicate this dilemma is that it can vary from one task or event to the next; and it can leave the needy (or thought to be needy), and the help (or intended help) both confused, even frustrated.

You can be helped or you try to help; but...

I understood my role as a “first-alternate” helper, but I also had to work and, at times, teach and go to school. Yes, I chose to do these things but, whether one job or the next, considered it to be beneficial to her and to them. Sometimes my other demands were viewed as an excuse rather than reason for my absence. This sense and disposition is probably common for couples—particularly when their roles are changing or have changed. But this situation was another example of the dilemma. You can be helped or you try to help; but if you rebuff the help than resent the helper, how can you be helped and how can “the helper” help you?

Her friend had much better success in her role; as she offered the empathy of another mother, the love of a genuinely *good heart*, and the patience and persistence to be the best and the most-appreciated of helpers. My wife’s mother was not really accepting of being this type of help but, I think, considered my wife to be “the help” or, more likely, the helpless when she was around. Redressing the lifestyle of *command and control*, I am convinced that her mother could make her angry and frustrated more than one could believe at first. I know from own

experience at working with my dad, the job could be done either his way or the sub-standard way; but for her mother, help could have been most appreciated in the form of encouragement or “Lifetime Lifting”. *Command and control* took a different course.

The mother and daughter relationship is important, of course. The demands of her mother’s role—as both parent and full-time employment—left little time for a big family. Moreover, the mother (and children) had to contend with the role of their father that undoubtedly intensified the demands of the home. Yes, my wife’s mother chose to remain married to her first husband, married the “second him”—and tolerated them both. But in her own “Maze Minding”, she chose or made some choices too.

Similarly, my wife and I made choices and, I would argue, often with good intentions or purpose for the family. I worked hard and helped with the children on the weekends; she worked hard and sometimes had some or much of the weekend to rest or recreate, if possible. Raising children was a collection of challenges where encouragement can make a positive difference...and criticism can not. Where a mother can find such a positive difference is among other mothers—who understand and can be more empathetic. But where frustration and hurt can find its greatest cause is from those whom are seemingly closest to us. She had been through a lot with her mother—and her mother had put them through a lot. *Command and control* superseded them all.

My wife was looking for her mother’s approval. It was not enough that her husband approved or complimented her, but it was the approval that most children (if not all children) naturally seek from the parent or parents. Simply put, it’s that simple and periodic expression of love that comes in verbal or

Maze Minding

affectionate action. For the good friend that may have become a somewhat surrogate mother or sister, the approval was in the form of true help—without criticism or some subtle competition. For her mother—though a much more complicated relationship—the expectation and desire for approval was still wanting from my wife’s childhood...and perhaps always will be.

To be more specific, this needed approval was most-likely not existent or, at best, occasional in her childhood (to include adolescence). At the risk of sounding like a self-described therapist (or an ex-spouse looking for excuses), I am trying to consider the importance of parents and their relationship to their children. My wife had longed for this approval. At this major juncture of life (as a parent herself), she was looking for the simple expression of approval from the one remaining parent. But I don’t think her mother was capable of offering such....

Her mother approved of, and most-likely fostered, independence above all else. Not independence from her necessarily (or the parent), but independence economically—because men are not reliable and, worse yet, are rogues. To have children in the first place, would put her (the daughter) in jeopardy of the same plight that the mother had experienced; so to have children was my wife’s first mistake (in the sentiment of her mother). I don’t think my wife considered her mother’s opinion in the actual choice to have children. I could be wrong but, with what I saw and have shared thus far, her mother’s scars (or wounds) were just too deep to have overcome this sentiment—for her and potentially, for her children.

*...having
children...was
bittersweet for
my wife’s
mother...*

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In my observation, having children (or grandchildren) was bittersweet for my wife's mother: on the one hand, she could potentially needle her way to *command and control*—which gave her the sense that she was still needed—or she could counter with criticism as another form of control. The “bitter” aspect of this relationship or choice was her own failures to her children—in light of the addiction and abuse—and concern perhaps that her children just might be able to do a pretty good job at it (marriage and family) in spite of the past. Somewhat like a child, her mother was very insecure, and subject to similar motives to manipulate for the probable reason that she too was looking for approval from her children.

Our family—and particularly my wife—was not the first to endure the nature of the (or these) relationships. The oldest couple, who had three children, was also *under frequent fire*—and had been for some time, it seemed. Not always directly from the mother, but certainly approved (or accepted) by her, the criticism was such that they could do *no-right* even though I think they did a lot right.

What I observed in time is that they (the oldest couple with three children) eventually or progressively distanced themselves from the mother. “If you can't stand the heat, than get out of the kitchen”; and if you can do *no-right* as far as they're concerned (mother and...), than don't leave mad...but just leave. The oldest couple made a choice to leave—though living just across town.



Wind Watching

Like the wind, problems can sometimes be seemingly invisible—while the effect or outcome is not. Watching meant waiting; and sometimes the wind could come like a fury—from what direction, I cannot tell you to this day....

What is the wind? You can feel it, but you cannot see it; well, you cannot see it, but you can feel and see its effect. You might have a gentle wind that cools you on a humid day, a fair breeze that makes the trees sway, or a tempest or fury that can knock you out-of-the-way. What is true about the later is that, in the experience or even leading-up to it, you may not be prepared—whether it is a dramatic change in places, people or problems.

In the real sense or knowledge of foul weather, we have the benefit of the most elaborate and expensive meteorological advancements; yet, how many occurrences do we still see (or experience) where readiness was somewhat off? The actual experience of one of these hurricane-force gale winds may offer some further lessons in the way of preparedness or readiness. Still, it is human nature that, with the on-again, off-again of actual severity or potential, some may be lulled into idleness or annoyed by the “fire-drill” process.

There is seldom a moment of idleness with small children and babies: someone is getting sick and someone is getting well;

someone is sleeping and someone is not; someone is hungry and someone is, well, you know. The simple truth is that the wind is

The response or reaction to inevitable change is important.

much more than the *pit-patter of little feet*; but it is the collection of sights, sounds and situations that can happen in a moment, a day or over many days—why even over a lifetime! Like the variety of the wind, change can come in a trickle, a steady pour, or a deluge; and when and how it does come is not something that

we can lay claim to—as it just happens with or without our preparedness or readiness.

The response or reaction to inevitable change is important. Sometimes it's just an inconvenience, while other times the wind (or change) may result in re-building from the damage and loss. One of my favorite music artists, John Denver, writes in “Windsong” that the wind is “the bearer of bad and good tidings” and “the weaver of darkness, the bringer of dawn”. His words are what I find true or characteristic of the *winds of change*; and at the risk of missing much in the artist's meaning, I hold that the wind can bring goodness and badness, light and darkness, anger and its fury.

On the analogy or use of wind to describe *change* (or changing roles) is also the child-like curiosity to understand what causes wind in the first place. From “Dan's Wild, Wild Weather Page”:

It is created by large scale differences in the air's density. This forces the air to move toward regions of lower pressure. The greater the differences in pressure, the stronger the wind...

Wind Watching

If “real” or actual wind is caused by two differing air masses (or degrees of pressure) can it not be said that the analogous “change” is too. *Change* does not occur without some impetus or cause, does it? What’s more, *change* may also involve the willingness to do so—the *will* to want to change or to allow change to occur. Sometimes our *human will* may not have much to do with the *change*—as we may want one thing but endure or accept another— but our individual or personal reaction and response is central to the benefits or blessings of *change*.

In one or more of the movies capturing the old sailing ships of the Royal Navy, the crew or voyage experience “the doldrums” or a period of complete idleness or stillness. Obviously such a weather condition is unfavorable for a sailing ship and, waiting for the doldrums to *blow over*, the crew can become very testy and anxious. *Dead-in-the-water* is idleness of the air, and of the hand and minds of the crew. In one of those movies, *Master and Commander*, Captain Aubrey replies to this condition (of the doldrums), “I can harness the wind, but I’m not its damn creator”. Once again, *change* cannot be created or caused by us alone, but it is something that we can harness—or at least try. Even the most severe of these conditions bring opportunity, benefits, and blessings if we believe in the providence of God.

The most dramatic and destructive of *change* was indisputably divorce; as the tempest tore apart my family leaving a path of destruction that goes well beyond the marriage and the experiences of being a parent. This unprecedented “storm of the century” is one that has not been forgotten—and never will! There were many cool breezes and even sporadic northeasters that tore away *at the shores*; but this storm was the one that is beyond reconstruction or recovery.

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Imagine a storm-front that lands, decimates, and departs; then before reconstruction commences, another comes right behind...followed by another and.... Well, I think you get the concept. Divorce is like that (or has been like that): it is not one storm—if only that were possible—but a recurring, relentless fury that will not bend, but will break and burst everything in its path and peripheral. This cyclic weather pattern is without the calmness and clearness that usually follows such extreme change, but continues such that no calmness or clearness is possible. Where there seems to be such relief or recovery, it is overshadowed by an endless, dark sky and foreboding sense that nothing has or will change for the better. In addition to the shear strength and staying power of this storm is that it is not seasonal or subject to such patterns.

Such a storm (or storms) would only be possible where there is a continuum or ever-growing disparity of degrees of pressure; of good and bad, light and darkness, anger and its potential. If this disparity did not (or does not) relent—but grows instead—than the storm is only strengthened and the frequency multiplied. A storm of this nature actually feeds on its fury and frequency; that like some great conqueror or commander, each episode and event only strengthens its power for the next offensive.

Wind Watching

With a bit of a *shift in the wind*, let me associate this megastorm to the matter of divorce and marriage. In his book, *The Custody Revolution*, Robert Warshak describes one or more conditions that involve custody and parental visitation:

Then there are some divorced mothers who would do everything possible to keep their ex-husbands away from the children. Often the motive is a wish to punish the father by denying him access to his children. In some instances, the mother may fear for her children's safety – for example, when the father is likely to abuse or kidnap the children. But in many cases, the divorced woman's own hurt or anger clouds her assessment of her ex-husband's worth to the children. (22)

Not only are men (or non-custodial parents) often vexed by such conditions but, as Warshak explains, so are their parents (or the grandparents of the children):

Grandparents are the forgotten victims of modern divorces. Too often, the father's parents lose all contact with their beloved grandchildren. Much of my mail is from grandparents who are desperate for information about how they can retain meaningful involvement with their grandchildren after a divorce. (24)

I have offered a simple explanation of the wind: the source of wind, the general categories of wind (from my experience and perspective), and the association of wind to goodness, badness, and so forth. What I have not done as of yet is applied the abstract association of wind to divorce and marriage.

I do not think that anyone stays the same over a length of time; as they live and experience life, they have to change one

*I do not think
anyone stays the
same...*

way or another. Ideally, a person or persons change for the better; that life, whatever it brings, enables betterment over bitterness. While it is dangerous and reckless to make such broad-brushed assertions, the point is that each

juncture in this *journey of life* offers the incremental direction of one or the other; either a life of betterment or a life of bitterness.

For a Believer or Christian, this life depends largely on the willingness or decision to forgive others; and similarly, to accept God's forgiveness for the wrongs we have done toward God and others. I could elaborate on this matter, but the basic understanding is that we are to forgive just as we have been forgiven. When we forgive, the consequences may not depart, but the condition of bitterness will...over time. Though we live with (or deal with) the consequences, we can find some degree of peace (or release) through this *will* to forgive; but when we live without forgiving—and hold on to our anger—the bitter, strong fury of winds will continue...and even escalate.

When we live without forgiving, or when we have unresolved anger toward others, the tempest will be tempted—even pressed—to spawn at any time for reasons undetermined and unresolved. This series of storms may have actually begun long ago; long before the divorce and the marriage but, even as far back as childhood and adolescence. The truth is that we learn much during these formative years with what is modeled; but we can ideally segregate such learning as healthy and unhealthy—as constructive or destructive. I am not saying that such change is easy; on the contrary, I think it can be hard for several reasons.

Wind Watching

The possibility remains however that, because our parents are not perfect (and sometimes are far from it), we should attempt to examine and eliminate those behaviors that are found to be destructive or divisive—that lead to a damned relationship rather than a decided marriage.

To remind the reader, the environment in which she grew-up was absent from a father in any true sense. What's worse is that the natural and step-father were both alcoholics; and, while the second eventually quit in lieu of death, he continued to be destructive and divisive. In both relationships, the mother was seemingly tolerant; not that this action was necessary to survive, but it has some negative consequences—not the least of which is a very dim view of men in any capacity.

The children (the five daughters) were each subject to some level or experience of this sometimes described co-dependent relationship; but for my ex-wife, the effect was amplified by virtue of her family order and the unfortunate and unreasonable marriage of yet another addict. If the natural father was harmful, the step-father was much more.... He not only accepted the figurative baton from the first, but he used it to beat-up members of the family who knew him for what he was...and was not.

Returning to the term of *command and control*, I look to a much admired and respected source. Erwin Lutzer writes in his book, *Why Good People do Bad Things*, the three levels of control:

Some want to control others in personal matters; others want to control them to selfishly protect themselves from personal pain or to exalt themselves. For many, controlling other people and circumstances is their only source of personal significance. Some forms of control could be labeled a nuisance; others should be labeled a sin, while some kinds must be called evil. (137)

Dr. Lutzer continues:

...A controller is never satisfied; for every event must continue to be controlled...he will create a new crisis so that he will have something to control...They find it hard to rejoice over another's good fortune and hard to forgive. (137-)

I am not saying that *command and control* is in-excusable, and I'm not suggesting that my observation and experience is *right-on* either; but what I am attempting to prove is that *the orange falls close to the tree*.

Can I support "what I am attempting to prove?" I don't know. My profession does not lend well to this subject or study.

I only have my observation and experience to go on. Still, I will try.

*Can I support
"what I am
attempting to
prove"?*

As a once-husband, the observation and experience will be further supported in the coming pages and chapters; perhaps with a description of court appearances, affidavits,

testimonies, and legal documents and discourse. How much of a crisis does the controller need? Would they be willing to lie under oath, to falsify documents, and to implicate their children? Observation and experience tell me so.

Several years prior to the divorce, or around 1995, my wife and I were in marriage counseling. After moving to Atlanta, or in 1997, we began a second marriage counseling program at the advice of our pastor. At the same time, I was involved in a men's Bible study at the same church. Aside from the general study, we shared some of our personal problems or other concerns. I remember one man's discussion of an experience with an

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employer. He said that he could never do enough to please his employer (or manager); that no matter what he did, the manager seem to *raise the bar* another notch or two. In the sum of this experience was the realization that no matter what he did, it was never enough. Sometime during this experience, he realized that he could not continue working for this employer.

His discussion reminded me of my marriage; a relationship where no matter what I did or how much I tried, it was never enough. The most poignant indication of this dilemma was in the repeated and sometimes frequent use of the “D” word; yes, “Divorce” became the lever by which control could be resumed and the spouse relegated to a life of impassable performance and daunting demarcations or boundaries. But such a dilemma, however accepted or endured, is a symptom—and not a cause—of the essence or root of the problem. At the root is *command and control*—where one is willing and able to use such devices to wield and maintain apparent control over the other.

Far from the true meaning of love is the abuse of power. The discussion of an employer may be understood under the auspices of a Type-A personality or actions of the ultimate authoritarian. But a marriage is ideally a balance of mutual authority supported by ever increasing love and respect. When authority is out-of-kilter (on either side), respect *goes by the board*; and, as far as love, disavowed love for another has been preceded by dissipated love for self.

...a marriage is ideally a balance of mutual authority...

Some may be familiar with the character that I describe above; the spouse—typically portrayed as a man—who berates his wife for anything whether real or imagined. His demeanor is usually someone who is visibly

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unhappy or unsatisfied; and may even show signs or expressions of regret for which blame and responsibility is always pointed to someone else. He may actually create a crisis as an illusive way of offsetting his insecurities. Lies and deception are all within his means for *command and control*; as often the route for rationalizations, *the end justifies the means*.

I'm not sure if the employer (or manager) was this type of character; but I am sure that in my varied employment, such characters exist. What's more, I am certain that—by experience and observation—my ex-wife is such a character as particularly apparent during and following the divorce process.

On the matter of employment and relationships, I remember a statement (or advice) of a career counselor. He told me that there are those (in the workplace) who will “shit on you” for no reason in particular. To interpret his statement (or advice), I think that some people will hate you almost as much as they hate themselves. As to the reasons, I do not know in particular. Envy, jealousy, and raw wickedness is among some potential reasons (or causes); but again, “my profession does not lend well to this subject or study.” All I have is my firsthand observation and experience at “Wind Watching”.



Oar Over-Easy

While I don't begin to have a 'grasp' of boating—and have not always been a team player—the association is that the oar must be in the water—if we're going to be effective; without it, we either stop, go in circle, or drift aimlessly wherever...

The thought occurred to me of boating, rafting and the like. On the few times or excursions, a paddle or oar ends-up in the water and, whether actually needed or not, “the crew” usually has to stop, turn and retrieve it. One of the most challenging of these experiences was white-water rafting—where the turbulence can carry the oar down-stream keeping the crew on the chase. It is good that the oar floats, otherwise....

But in the case of a couple or family, the likely association might be a boat where the adults are doing most of the paddling (or should be) and the children are passively riding along. One oar might act as the rudder as well, and the other as a second for power or for a somewhat counter force to keep the boat moving in the intended direction—like a canoe, for example. What is important is ultimately having teamwork or a concerted effort.

Certainly, a team does not want to work in opposition, but I'll *get to that* later; for the moment, and in relation to the title above, the occurrence or practice of “Oar Over-Easy” is not

working at all—or is casting the oar into the water and actually or figuratively walking away.

In the last chapter, I talked about the wind and its properties of varying intensity and change; that these *winds of change* are not ours to always decide or control, but yet we have some influence over the effect by how we react (or accept) the changes. When *change* is upon us and we attempt to resist or to avoid it, the consequences can be entirely different than if we understand that such a reaction is futile; and instead, accept the *change* with some grace, even gratitude.

Even before consideration of such changes is the relatively steady-streams of life that we travel daily or routinely. Yes, there may be a turn, narrow pass, or even rapids up ahead; but we can we can make it—and may even keep ourselves dry. Along the way of these trips, we may have to consider another crew member (such as a child), but that again is all due to the wind in the first place and not the relatively routine and mild boating excursion.

If a rowboat loses one of the oars, than it's possible you can go around in circles; and how frustrating it is to cover the same ground again and again—seemingly making little progress. If a canoe loses an oar or paddle, it either loses direction (as with the back oar or rudder) or additional power.

Losing an oar (in actuality) is not usually intended or, in other words, is an accident...and just happens. In my few white-water experiences, an oar can be *given-up* because the raft rolls or someone falls overboard. Whatever the incident or encumbrance, the oar is seldom if ever purposely thrown into the water or *given-up*.

In the routine of marriage and its challenges is the association of losing or *giving-up* the oar; it is saying that I (whichever person that is) do not want to go down this water-way

Oar Over-Easy

anymore; “I am tired, disgusted, bored” or a combination....but “I am through” (for the day or routine). There may be some justification or due-cause for these feelings or conditions, but the decision of divorce is not really as simple as *tossing the oar* and walking away. No, there remains some semblance of *the boat*, complete with the crew and passengers, and the routine of the waters wherever or whatever. Divorce is the culmination of all this “tossing”; it is a mutiny or insurrection.

Even before the *final mutiny* or insurrection come the signs of discontent and disgust. Whether struggling through a storm or sitting idle in the doldrums, this discontent and disgust can be born; and if not addressed and attended, can and will continue to grow and heighten with occasional or periodic *tossing of the oar* or some other show of temper. This action (or reaction) may be relatively subtle in a sort of passive-aggressive behavior: the oar is not actually thrown or tossed but is held motionless, drawn from the water or is worked without good intention. The action may be words only, or it may be a combination of words and actions. What dominates the mind of the developing mutineer is what drives him to do such a thing of *tossing the oar*—with all the risk and potential reward that awaits him at *the other end*.

I have mentioned before that marriage offers a mutual authority and, since both share some authority, the best possible course is to respect that authority and to work together in a common cause. There are times, I believe, when the husband (and possible father) is “the captain” and the wife (and possible mother) is the first mate; but there are also times, when the wife has command of the deck and has been appointed or commissioned to do so. She is very experienced or suited for this role and may very well prefer to do it for all good intention and purpose (for the crew and passengers). But without going

into the specifics or even detailed possibilities, the point is that sometimes one has to steer and the other has to power or help; and when one is not helping the other and, worse yet, is intentionally resisting the other, than the trip is less than effective and quite ill-fated for a day's journey or a mission at length.

There were times in my marriage where I wondered what my wife was doing; or more specifically, why she was angry and,

*There were times
when I
wondered ...why
she was angry...*

in her anger, tossed the figurative oar over the side and literally walked away. A trip to visit family in Alabama was one of such occasions where, for reasons I have never understood, she left the house and walked with intention toward the bus station to buy a ticket back to

Florida. It was on a morning that this occurred and, not knowing what prompted or motivated her action, I and the kids left the park (where we were playing) and returned back to the house to shore things up. Admittedly, there were not many of these extreme experiences of open insurrection; but there were many times that her anger—well pronounced and projected—was without any understanding (to include an explanation of the cause). She seldom if ever explained her reason for anger; it's possible that she knew (the reason)—but it was as though she had the right and privilege without any accountability or responsibility.

I was not the only one who recognized or experienced this circumstance. In a somewhat ironic example (to the title and analogy), she and I had taken an evening cruise aboard a river boat with other members of our church. One of the other couples apparently commented (to each other) on my wife's described behavior while on board. Being on a boat, she could

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not walk-away very far; but, as a show of her attitude, she did keep her distance and, for that reason, was apparently noticed by others. The possibility of such action could be that one or the other can be insensitive or intolerant of the other's feelings; where the wants (and needs) of the one is ignored or de-valued by the other. But such a problem or cause for her anger (or reaction) is not, I believe, what was at cause or involved in these occurrences. If anything, the attention and awareness was more intense—in response to the magnitude of her behavior in the first place. I could not always predict—much less explain—these occurrences of her temper; but if I could begin to understand the cause of anger (or what initiated her actions), maybe I could be more sensitive and understanding.

By the time my oldest child was six, this behavior had *become like clockwork*; and almost every weekend, her behavior would predictably *rise to the occasion* and carry-over to the following Monday. At or about the same time, we were visiting with our first of two marriage counselors. I remember distinctly the session where she had told the counselor that I never got angry and, in attempt to get me angry, she smashed (or destroyed) a guitar of mine. It was true that she did smash the guitar, but it was not true (or accurate) that I did not get angry.

The continued occurrence of this behavior had become more than I could deal with through patience or passiveness. We were both tired with three and then four children at our feet and, working two jobs and going to school, I stayed on the go. As I've mentioned before, the weekends were a time to take the children and offer her some repose; but as I think about it, taking the children and leaving the house was also a bit of an escape. By leaving the house, the behavior could be left behind and we could (and did) have great times venturing off to a park, the

museum, or some other local attraction or festivity. During these days, I would rise Saturday morning, pack up the kids, and go to one or more of these places—and I could list at least a dozen places that we went. What was most important was just getting away from the rumblings and rises of this now recurring behavior.

What was most important was just getting away...

Those days were a blur as the evening spilled over to the morning and the morning usually came too early. Thank the Lord for coffee and the energy of youth and young parents.

Yes, God knew what he was doing when he established the relatively young for raising children—as it takes a lot of energy and endurance.

As mentioned before, I have wondered from time to time if we were prepared for the challenges of being parents of several children. Considering our backgrounds—or the way that we were raised—I don't believe that one or both of us shared a similar *will* or understanding of marriage and family. Maybe I was (or am) being too idealistic of my own parent's relationship, and with that, have too high an expectation of our own; but I don't think the kind of behavior and relationship that we had formed (or were forming) was true of my own parents. Someone had to work (away) and someone had to work (at home); someone had to make the meal and someone had to clean-up afterward; and so on and so forth. Above all these *oars in the water* (or out of the water) was the necessary conditioning to manage the *winds of change*.

Around this same time period, my work began to require some travel; not far and not for long, but travel just the same. It seems at times that this business travel was viewed as more a

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mini-vacation. When I returned home, my wife would suggest or express that it was time to get to work...and that the trip was over. As infrequent as the travel was, I could expect to get home on Friday night and take the kids on the following morning.

I felt unjustifiably guilty at times for the travel and, as possible, made an effort to stay in *the home port*; but there were unavoidable conditions of work that surpassed this effort and then, however infrequent it was, I would make *the voyage*. Some of my associates traveled a great deal more; basically, it came down to a managerial decision.

The expressed frustration (and resentment) of my travel was not the first of this kind; for there was other criticism in some aspect of my employment. As one of our close friends (at the time) put it, my wife was concerned that the health insurance was not enough, or concerned that I didn't make enough income, or concerned about the stability of the business, etc. The basic or common cause of "expressed frustration" was *command and control*.

I practiced several ways of responding to her anger. As I've described, one way was just to go somewhere with the kids—but this was not always an option or convenience. Another was to go to counseling on the prospect that I could better understand my part (or cause) for her frequent and sometimes predictable behavior; and in retrospect, I believe that counseling was good and beneficial for both of us. Another was to seek ways that I might reduce or relieve her workload or responsibilities. I thought the effort and right intention was applied in this attempt—although sometimes too much. Lastly was to *fight fire with fire* and, if she got angry, I would get angrier and, before you know it, we had a fight on our hands.

I begin with my regret that my children were exposed to (or experienced) some of this conflict or confrontation. It hurts me to know that they had to endure the arguments or fights with all the consequences of confusion and even shame. Some of what they witnessed was shared with my parents on more than one occasion. The children, and particularly my oldest two, had to be aware (and concerned) to the degree that they expressed their concerns to their grandparents, my parents.

As a child or young person, I don't recall arguments between the parents; maybe I didn't notice or didn't care, but to my recollection, they did not argue or fight in our presence. Whether this discretion was purposed or just consequential, I don't know; but again, I don't recall anything like my wife and I "put-on" for my children. It was wrong to expose my children to this conflict and, should I ever get the opportunity with my children, will be more than ready to admit it—to apologize for it.

I have read a few accounts of children (now adults) who describe such experiences with loathing; but as to whether the fights (or conflict) are worse than divorce will probably remain an

*Did my children
fare better by
divorce ... I did
not think so...*

open issue given all the possibilities and recollections. Did my children fare better by divorce—rather than conflict and contention? I did not think so when divorce was a legitimate threat, and nor do I think so now; but then I am attempting to answer this question

without the children's input or viewpoint.

As a parent and authority in our children's lives, we make decisions for them; and ideally, we make decisions with their best interest in mind—though they may not think so at the time. The decision not to divorce (or to consider divorce) was as much for

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their benefit as in my firm belief that justification for divorce did not exist. I have never once thought differently...and I don't foresee that I ever will. Children prefer a home where both parents love each other and love them; but if they have the later and accept the former as unlikely, they will do so. It is unfortunate that parents cannot be more effective or efficient in getting along; and it is obviously problematic to the marriage (and family) when they cannot or will not try to love, if just themselves.

The parent's relationship cannot be overstated in terms of its value or influence to the child or children; and when that relationship models more adversity (and even hatred) than the preferable love, the children bear the costs on their own relationships and understanding of what marriage and love is all about. Healthy marriages help children hunger for the learning and practice of love; conversely, unhealthy marriages undo or undermine the basic legacy of love as central to marriage and family.

I must continue to be careful about how much I elaborate on the experience of marriage and divorce; of a relationship where the vows and promises were broken expressively for the pursuit of personal happiness. But if experience can teach us (or should teach us), happiness cannot be truly achieved when it is dependent on other persons or relationships. I hold to the belief that happiness must begin inside (our hearts) and not from the outside—which is why some people can experience happiness (or more accurately, joy) in the midst of difficulty and hardship. Oh yes, our “needs” are important, but without getting into the subjective views of needs and wants, I know that joy comes from within.

A Once and Always Father

I know for a fact that my ex-wife is not happy; having seen her on occasion—and not withstanding the purpose for the encounter—she continues to be angry or bitter. One might argue that it could my presence or the given predicament, but they would be wrong. She may attempt to blame others—and may even convince herself that someone else is responsible for her happiness—but she is gravely wrong in doing so. She has continued (and will continue) in this vein for as long as she believes others are at fault or responsible—and that she is above reproach.

What troubles me most is that she has subordinated our children's best interests for her spite. She chose to divorce on the expressed want for happiness; and while she may have thought that her decision would not hurt the children, she was wrong. Her decisions have adversely changed their lives, their relationships and the general views of marriage and family. She has chosen to go beyond divorce in terms of parental division by lodging a campaign of criticism and condemnation toward me that began at least as early as the divorce and, most certainly, since that time. She has violated much of the "code of conduct" suggested or advised for parental involvement and participation—all at the aim of hurting me and the children's paternal family. In short, she has endowed on our children a level of hurt that could easily qualify for abuse, yet carried-out under the guise of love and protection.

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On this matter of confusing and conflicting information (given to the children), the authors write in *Don't Divorce Us! (Kids' Advice to Divorcing Parents)*:

In the absence of clear information about the divorce, children will construct their own ideas about who wants the divorce, who doesn't want the divorce, why their parents are divorcing and all of the other considerations. Usually, this will not be an accurate picture, and it will lack the balance and comfort that can be offered if parents are clear and honest with their children in sensitive, loving, and non-accusatory ways. Children do not want to feel responsible for their parent's unhappiness. Furthermore, they do not want to live in a home filled with anger, sadness, bitterness, silence, or abuse. They want loving, stable parents. (26-)

The writers continue to describe what children want, if divorce occurs:

They want their parents to get along and behave respectfully to each other. From the perspective, it seems so little to ask. They don't want to be treated like possessions, spies, messengers, or a means by which one parent can get even with the other parent. The hardest part to understand is that the children want to be allowed to make up their own minds about their parents. Even if one parent is far less involved, far less mature or caring, they still don't want the better parent judging or speaking poorly of the other. They report feeling much happier if parents are neutral, or mildly supportive of even the less-than-ideal parents. (26-)

How much is personal happiness worth? In an attempt to answer that question, I will omit the actual dollar figure and stick to the more important intangible costs, described as hurt, to my children. Let me say as well, if my ex-wife did not know any

better, the conduct of her post-divorce behavior and actions might be understood; but she is without excuse because she knows—and has been told—that her motivations and actions are the worst possible legacy to leave the children.

I'm not suggesting that the children's lives are hopeless (as I do not know what the future holds for each of them); but what I am saying is that the children (and any children) deserve better.

*Invoking fear in
the children... is
likewise
inexcusable...*

Feeding them erroneous or misleading information about their father and grandparents is purposely deceptive and destructive; and as anyone in the “appropriate” profession will tell you, is more about control and spite. Invoking fear in the children is likewise

inexcusable—as it convolutes and confounds what they experienced in the presence of the paternal family. While the clear objective is to hurt the paternal family through such tactics or methods, the outcome or result for the children is distrust and disgust—at one or both parents.

The limited instruction that we received as a post-divorce requirement and all subsequent coursework and material (that I've gotten my hands-on) confirms that such ill-conceived measures of control always have negative and destructive consequences. Like our countries' foreign policies and “blowback”, the unintended consequences lead to a host of problems touched-on already and elaborated-on in the chapters to come. Unlike such international policies, this “diplomacy” involves family relations...and not foreign relations.

Such an opportunity to love and give to these children has been subordinated and subjugated for one parent's spite. What a sad commentary for one who has been given so much in the

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way of four children; as what began as an “Oar Over-Easy” has turned into a ill-conceived mission to *the end of the earth*; and what a misfortune for four children who had opportunity to realize the commitment(s) made to them by us. God forgive us.



Demarcation Drawing

*Well, you can't draw a line in the water, but you can in the sand.
Demarcation was basically to establish what was acceptable and
not; but the trouble was that the line or demarcation was
constantly being washed away and being redrawn...I think?*

The term or title, “Demarcation Drawing”, warrants some explanation from the start. In my field or profession, limits or constraints are assumed or accepted for problems of one kind or another. We have limits or boundaries that we establish for ourselves, others establish for us, or we establish for others. Sometimes these limits are subject to change and sometimes are firm or *cast in stone*; than again, these limits may not be clear to us or to anyone else—and are subject to confusion, misunderstanding, rationalization, and abuse. We set limits on ourselves that, depending on the integrity, we may compromise or rationalize for condition, circumstance and convenience. But nothing is more frustrating than when such limits (or expectations) are imposed on us without clarity or full understanding and, further, with random and unreasonable terms and conditions. “Demarcation Drawing” is like drawing a line in the sand next to the tide-water so that, with the tide, it is intermittently drawn again...and again.

Marriage is not a contract—not unless there is a prenuptial agreement. As I have expressed in my belief, this relationship of

marriage is a covenant or binding agreement. Certainly the couple (and individual) has needs and desires but, in this relationship, expression or clarification of all of them is not specified upfront as “terms and conditions”. In all fairness and understanding, needs and desires should be presented and pursued under the protection of love. *Love covers a multitude of sins* and, in marriage, can (and should be) the source of strength over the invariable challenges and disappointments of both the individual and couple. Can or should we expect more from our spouse than we honestly can offer ourselves? Can we overlook or deny the mystery of love that enables two people to fulfill the obligation and commitment of a covenant—in view of the inability to meet all the other’s needs and desires?

Love is a powerful force, of course; and one that has to be present (and growing) in a marriage or covenant. If love is faltering—to include stagnating (or not maturing)—than the relationship becomes nothing except a set of imposed or implied laws (limits or constraints). When the marriage or relationship is largely measured on the perception or assessment of following or complying with these laws or rules, love has been subordinated by the one or the other. At the risk of being misunderstood (as endorsing some form of an “open-marriage”), let me clarify that

...is not about love; it is about control...

my beliefs are predicated on a relationship of grace that, while having guidelines, is not holding the other to *the letter* of some contrived law aimed at control more than love. “Demarcation Drawing” is not about love (in the

matter of marriage); it is about *command and control* as one form of abuse.

Demarcation Drawing

In “Wind Watching”, I introduced this belief (or observation) of control; and in “Oar Over-Easy”, I introduced the expression of her anger as the apparent infusion of fear in our children lives. Having introduced this observation and expression, I now will make attempt to draw the relationship between this behavior (and lifestyle) with the limits described as “Demarcation Drawing”.

One of the few examples that I have pertains to my oldest child. In 2006 (six years after the divorce), my parents attempted to see him play in the band at a ball game. He and his sister play (or played) in the marching band. The grandparents had planned to visit friends in the area and decided to attend the game on a very rare possibility of seeing two of my children. At the end of the game, they (the grandparents) tried to approach each of my children: my daughter actually ran from her grandmother; and my son showed the expression of fear when approached by his grandfather. In a brief expression, my son told his grandfather that if his sister saw them (the grandparents), that she would tell her mother and that I (their father) would be arrested.

I do not believe that my son was lying; but that he was sincerely truthful (though fearful) of any contact with his paternal family. He was being honest because such fear has been infused in his life. My son (and children) have been deceived (or otherwise disposed) into believing (or accepting) that he should fear his paternal family. If he (or the children) have not (or will not) accept their mother’s instruction, than she has (or will) use other forms of fear to *drive home* control. My son did not believe that he had reason to fear his grandparents; but he evidently did believe that his father would be arrested—as his mother has taught him. One fear or another is still fear...and control.

The limits or constraints imposed on the children did not begin in 2006, but had become a tool or method of ensuring her *command and control* over the post-divorce relationships. Even prior to the divorce, she was already *forming a basis*. In 2000, at a divorce hearing, she asserted that the grandparents had been abusive toward the children—because they (and the children) camped-out in the garage of their house. The actual details of this experience or event: the children were supposed to camp-out in the backyard, but foul weather spoiled these plans; cots were set-up in the garage for some semblance of the camp-out. There was nothing remotely abusive about their grandfather's decision or alternative. My ex-wife's assertion was ludicrous to the point that the judge overlooked it; but as far as motive, the assertion was only another means to her methods. Ironically, the fear my ex-wife (and now, my children) expressed in the form of affidavits or testimony is in part the impetus of this book and much of my writings. Above all—and beyond the limits and constraints imposed on my role as parent—is the desire to reassure my children that they do not have to fear their parent, grandparents or paternal family. I remind the reader of the related discussion of Robert Warshak in his book, *The Custody Revolution*: “Then there are some divorced mothers who would do everything possible to keep their ex-husbands away from the children.”

How does fear and control relate? Perhaps more discussion and examples would be helpful for me (and potentially for you) to understand; but to start, the basic definition of anger is: frustration experienced when control is not possible over situations, individuals or groups. From Gary Smalley's book, *If Only He Knew*, anger occurs when we cannot obtain what we think will make us happy (or when our objectives are blocked) and fear

Demarcation Drawing

results from this perception of blocked objectives. Obviously, fear and control are in close relation.

What I found—and particularly noticed as we passed through the phase of child-bearing—was the growing application of fear in our marriage through, among other things, the threat of divorce. It seemed that this method was the *final solution* for re-establishing some sense of control and power. I acknowledge that a wife does (and should) exercise a degree of control in the family and home; but what I present is not a constructive form aimed at supporting a healthy relationship, but a destructive form that—whether intended or not—destroys a relationship through the invocation of *fear and flight* rather than *love and commitment*. I also propose that this method or “device” (as I have called it) was learned in part from a very young age from her parents.

On the matter of fear and its application in families, I also need to distinguish between *healthy fear* that is genuinely aimed at protecting children, from the fear used as leverage to control persons or situations. In reality, the later form is used commonly in society; for example, if you don’t meet the obligations of the contract, you lose the business or suffer penalties, etc. But I’m not really talking about business and contracts, but instead, about families and covenants. As another example, if you invoke caution in your child to reduce some risk in their life, than you are truly attempting to protect them; but if you deceive them by defaming others or you threaten them in measure and method— as described earlier with my oldest child—than fear is being used in the worst sense.

*But if you
deceive
them...then fear
is being used in
the worst sense.*

A Once and Always Father

As often as Nazi Germany is *covered* in books and documentaries, the question I have often ask (myself) is: How did the people accept (or tolerate) the atrocities and aggression of the politic, military and authorities? I have come to believe that—for those who ultimately did not resist—the authorities used fear in one of two ways: either fear of failure through economic or national ruin (Versailles Treaty, hyper-inflation, international condemnation), or fear of rejection (to include arrest, torture and death) in the growing power and prominence of the Nazi party. I believe these two forms of fear are (or were) very effective in attaining and maintaining control (for some) as described in Erwin Lutzer's book, *Hitler's Cross*.

The character of Hitler has been described as “promising and passionate” (though history has presented him as the picture of evil). He imbued these qualities to the degree that his rise ushered in promise on the perception that a race of people, victimized on international scale, would not be defeated or destroyed. He gave the people hope, but as history bears out, he also deceived the nation by posing as the bearer of peace when war was the doctrine of his (or the parties) philosophy and plan. It was the perception of being a victim that so fueled fury in the nation; a fury or anger to commit atrocities and aggression seemingly to survive as a “purified people”, a party and perhaps something more. *Another wolf in sheep's clothing....*

No doubt that my assessment or summary is *off-base* and, to suggest that this historical period has any parallel to my ex-wife, does seem farfetched. What I am suggesting however, is that fear *comes packaged* in a variety of ways. *Real fear* cannot be overlooked and, in fact, may consume our lives.

When a child is threatened by an adult—to include a parent with such intensity as I have described—he is experiencing *real*

Demarcation Drawing

fear as a method of control. When a person presents themselves as a victim in a vein of which they knowingly are not in fear, than they are experiencing what I call a “pseudo fear”. They do indeed have a fear—not of victimization—but of being exposed for who they are...or what they’ve done or said—contrary to truth. *Pseudo fear* has an element of fear cloaked in an outcry of victimization—though with the possibility (or risk) of being exposed as a villain or *wolf*.

Were the Germans *real* victims of a world plot or international oppression; or did they in some way and degree create this condition based on circumstances of WWI and other global events? I don’t know; but what I do believe is that this *pseudo fear* was employed to invoke the passion of the people—such that their deepest sentiment could be conjured-up to accept and even support the political party. I believe that individuals can and do use victimization—with all its public services—to dupe and deceive even their own children, if that is possible. Victimization enables one to garner the expected empathy of other (victims), the support of public services (law enforcement, courts, etc.) and the allegiance of those seemingly closest to them. Yes, the Nazi party was profound in winning the allegiance of its people, but also, to pacify other powers as to the purpose and plan.

The trouble with vouching as a victim is that there are (or exist) *real victims*; and like *real fear*, *real victims* are authentic and truthful in the presentation or condition. *Real victims* are why real laws and statues are put into place—to help or protect them. The trouble with real laws and statues (of this kind) is that, like other public services, there is always some who misuse it—who do not truly qualify (as victims), yet lie or falsify information to do so. I call this behavior or lifestyle “abusing *The System* designed to aid

the abused.” Meanwhile, the *real victims* of society must compete (to some degree) with the charlatans and, as far as the children are concerned (in this case), *pseudo fear* and *real fear* become so entwined as to be inseparable—rendering another generation of potential, pseudo victims.

Am I contriving some sort of ridiculous association; or is the tacit analogy of the Third Reich completely absurd? I am really not; but I do believe that, in my limited understanding of the one and the greater understanding of the other, some similarities exist in behavior, fear, and control. Both the historical example and the family dynamic are rooted in anger, and both involve *real fear* and *pseudo fear* in an attempt to achieve control.

My children are actually afraid of me and my family—as evidence has been (and will be) presented; their fear is not because of what I (or we) have done, but because of what she has expressed and infused into their lives. As with much of the German populous, the children may be on a course of similar behavior that depends on a lifestyle of lies and illusions to justify their decisions—however destructive to themselves and those they claim to care about.

*Control may be
out-of-control
when...*

As listed in a previous chapter, control has several forms; but to this point, I may not have presented or discussed the reason or need. I did mention that some level of control is customary and, for a household and family, is essential. At the same time, control may be out-of-control when the method(s) include unreasonable or unexplained bouts of anger or rage as described in a previous chapter.

Demarcation Drawing

Referring again to the book *Why Good People Do Bad Things*, Erwin Lutzer addresses “the roots of rage” as:

People who feel cheated often have an overwhelming sense of anger toward those who have “done them in.” They seethe with resentment and want to “show them a thing or two.” (91-)

As a destructive form of control, her anger was developed at an early age, I believe; and as already described, her anger was possibly learned from her parents’ relationship.

Whether she was telling the truth or not, my ex-wife once confided in my father (her father-in-law) that she had been abused as a child (by her father). Again, I cannot say that her claims were true; but accepting this possibility does add some credence to the early-development of her anger.

From the same chapter and book, *Why Good People Do Bad Things*:

A woman who has been abused by men will carry that anger into her marriage unless the root of the resentment is identified and dealt with. Like all of us, she must forgive those who have taken advantage of her, or her anger or distrust will be passed on to those around her...An angry woman will make her husband jump through all kinds of hoops, and should he succeed in meeting her expectations, she will change the rules so that he will fail again. (91-)

He mentions one example of this anger where a wife threw the flowers (her husband brought her) to the floor because they were not properly cut. I can recall more than once where flowers were crushed, through down, or otherwise deflowered—but I don’t know if stems or color had anything to do with it.

In the closing of this chapter, Lutzer describes the choice of forgiveness in more detail: “Without both honesty and forgiveness, there can be no freedom from the fits of rage.” What happens through the years when such anger is left unattended or is unresolved (or forgiveness is not pursued)? Without forgiveness, does the anger dissipate or possibly fade away? I don’t think so; but instead, anger continues in one’s life and is carried into their adulthood. What kind or level of control can manifest (or grow) in this unresolved anger; and as for the person or *carrier*, what can be expected of their heart and soul?

Here it is: the anger from childhood, left unresolved, will grow into adulthood as a more intense effect of possible abuse and certain, unachieved objectives or control in these early years. Although not clinically confirmed in my ex-wife, anger and control has the potential if not certainty of being evil. The evil controller uses lies to benefit and protect only self...and not others.

To describe someone as “evil”—even someone once so *seemingly close* to me—is a bold and risky assertion. After all, who am I to judge her; and how can I categorize her as evil? Perhaps the pages and chapters to come will present a more compelling argument for my description or judgment.

“Demarcation Drawing” is just another name for control—but structured with similarity to some of the other chapter titles. Draw a figurative line in the sand and say to the other person (or persons), “I dare you to cross it.” Then the waves roll-in under the aid of the *wind* and the line is practically washed away; though spontaneously, another line is drawn and, before the other person has moved, the line appears beneath or behind him. Yes, he has *crossed the line*—not because he accepted the challenge—

Demarcation Drawing

but because the line was washed away, and then redrawn beneath or behind him. He has failed regardless of his action (or inaction). The “evil controller” uses such a *device* as the illusive line to keep the other off-balanced, uncertain or otherwise unable to *meet the mark*. But if such a mark exists is really at issue for discussion. When you can use another *device* of lying, does such a line even exist, however illusive?



Divorce Drafting

“Divorce was even presented as a chance for inner growth and self-actualization. But the moral tides are turning, and people are showing a greater concern for the social cost of family breakdown...”

- Chuck Colson, *How Shall We Now Live?*, 1999

By now, I have made my view of divorce very clear; not only the social devastation to families (and children in particular), but also the “big business” (or greed) of this legal proceeding. No-fault divorce has not only opened *the doors*, but also *the windows* to so-called individual rights at the untold cost of children’s welfare and well-being—while proposing the notion that nobody is at fault. Imagine a war or battle where nobody is at-fault in spite of all the destruction and devastation; or the taking of an innocent life (without provocation) where nobody is at fault or in the wrong. The term “no-fault” applied to divorce is a contradiction unto itself and, as will be described in a brief history below, is not the result of human relief or charity but, instead, of *The State* replacing the church as the custodian of marriage.

In the early 1900’s, a form of no-fault divorce was instituted in Russia with the understood basis to be the replacement of ecclesiastical law with civil law—or with the replacement of the church by *The State*. Coincident to this change was the creation or formation of communism (Russian Revolution of 1917); thus, the underlying if not evident influences or political

motive behind the change. In this country (U.S.), similar “reform” took place in 1969 and, without much detail, spread across our land by 1983. In the most basic understanding, *no-fault* extends (or is an extension of) divorce beyond the traditional causes (adultery, addiction, abandonment, and abuse) and limits the decision of divorce to exclusively one spouse. The result or effect cannot be overlooked—as the statistics bear-out that, during the matching time period, divorce has skyrocketed.

The divorce rate has shown some recent retraction but so too has the marriage per capita. From a recent article in msnbc.com entitled: “U.S. divorce rate falls to lowest level since 1970”, the following summary:

America’s divorce rate began climbing in the late 1960’s and skyrocketed during the 70’s and 80’s, as virtually every state adopted no-fault divorce laws.

The article notes that a recent decline in the rate—apparently with status quo for no-fault divorce law—is due to a declining rate in marriage per capita:

The number of couples who live together without marrying has increased tenfold since the 60’s; the marriage rate has dropped by 30% in the last 25 years...

Yes, divorce has declined, but... marriage...

Yes, divorce has declined, but so too has marriage (per capita). But what about the profession of law; specifically, what about growth of this profession during the matching time period for this social trend called divorce? Well, as you probably guessed (or are aware); the profession has realized radical growth. It would be too careless to suggest or imply that

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one has a direct correlation to the other; but can you deny or overlook the relationship in the view of the originators of “the extension” and the consequences to marriage? Can you deny that divorce is “big business” for the legal community? The truth is that, sad though it be, *The State* has fostered the divorce rate by essentially taking the authorship and authority away from the church. This taking of marriage has reduced the institution from some semblance of holiness and covenantal responsibility to a *license* revocable for no reasonable cause or fault. From a legal aspect, marriage is only a license (or “voucher”) that generally involves a nominal fee or cost; but in relation to the profession of law, divorce is both a boon... and a boom!

The *good news* is that some sources within our society have been (and are) opposing “the extension” of divorce. According to sources cited in Wikipedia.com:

Members of fathers’ rights movements propose “reasonable limits” on no-fault divorce when children are involved.

Other commentators on no-fault divorce propose an amendment (to no-fault divorce) to create a presumption of custody of any minor children for the respondent (who is innocent or does not wish to divorce) regardless of gender.

Tim O’Brien, a proponent of the proposed amendment and a Libertarian, predicts that the proposed amendment would result in a plummeting divorce rate, and would reduce the negative consequences of divorce for children.

Sounds good; but what would happen to the “boon...and a boom”—or to this very profitable industry? Why don’t we ask the children—since they have a stake in this...as do their children...and their children...?

Some children (or a sample) have been asked (on this matter of divorce); not necessarily by their parents—but referring to the

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classic study, *Second Chances*. From the study, the following on the feelings of children (about divorce):

Children of all ages feel intensely rejected when their parents divorce. When one parent leaves the other, the children interpret the act as including them. Children feel intense loneliness. It amazes me how little support they get at this time, even from grandparents. Divorce is an acute, painful, long-remembered experience that children must often negotiate with the sense that they are alone in the world. All support, even their parents, seems to fall away. There may be no one to talk to, nowhere to turn. (12-13)

What might the children say in each personal case? Can they understand the concept of “no-fault” in divorce when, according to the study, they (the children) can be convinced that they too are at fault? From his own fifteen year study, Robert Warshak writes in *The Custodial Revolution*:

The situation is appalling and getting worse; our record-high divorce rate creates new victims daily, but no new solutions. As the worst battle scars are born by the children. Mental Health experts agree: one of the leading causes of emotional problems in children of divorce is the diminished contact with their fathers. (17)

“Where have all the fathers gone?” This question impulsively invokes the 60’s folk song by Pete Seeger—although it mentions nothing specific to fathers or children. If the song did (or could) post-add these characters (or families), what might it conclude or reason?

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Also at stake is what is referred to as *the greatest social crisis* of our day; yes, I mean the diminishing of dads in households and families. On the decline of marriage and the “disaster of fatherhood” in our culture, David Popenoe writes:

The decline of marriage is a disaster for fatherhood. Women have always been able to view marriage and childrearing as somewhat distinct institutions. Whatever their marital state, women bear children they generally assume responsibility for those children and continue to care for them over the course of their lives. For men, this is not the case. Men tend to view marriage and childrearing as a single package. If they are not married or are divorced, their interest in and sense of responsibility toward children greatly diminish. (25)

As marriage goes, so does fatherhood; and the trend toward fatherless homes has grown... and continues to grow—through both the destruction of divorce and the decline of marriage. You may already realize this social trend, but you may not be aware of the dramatic and alarming statistics associated to fatherless homes. At the risk of getting-off the intended topic—though offering the essence of why divorce is so destructive—let me assure you that the risks and consequences of divorce (to children and families) will be re-visited with depth in the chapters to come.

As marriage goes, so does fatherhood...

Well, now that you have *a taste* of the general industry (or “the divorce industry”) along with the social crisis and tragedy, allow me to get personal; or to elaborate with some repetition of my own recollection and regrets of divorce. My general sentiment—if not already presumed—was to avoid, avert or

altogether abstain from divorce. My belief is that, if you consider the possibility or practicality of this alternative, you are more-likely to exercise it. Even if your thinking is to express the “D-word” for control—or to invoke fear—you are *playing with fire*.

This “sentiment” was not shared by my wife however, as the “D” word” became a standard for her dictionary of “terms and conditions.” When conversation turned to conflict and reason gave way to rage, the “D” word” was deployed as an ultimatum or *final solution* to the moment. I admit that to simply hear the word was sometimes enough to get my attention and to acquiesce to the alibi (if there was one) that whatever caused her anger in the first place was beyond question or conclusion. I seldom understood why she would become so angry and, without her willingness to help me understand, stood little opportunity to draw conclusions. Oh yes, she did draw a “Demarcation” (as described in the last chapter), but when the lines change without explanation, the intentions seems more about control and less about conclusions.

My divorce was not the consequence of adultery, abuse, or abandonment; but as my wife (at the moment) blurted out to Judge Debra Turner, “He does not make me happy.” In hearing the statement—which I’ll never forget—came both the sadness that her decision was based on her want for happiness, and the shock that she was finally admitting the truth about her decision for divorce. But to carry truth further, her happiness was being predicated on the wrong person; or in other words, her misguided belief that her happiness hinges on her husband. When all the paperwork has been written and filed, and the attorneys have done their *dirty work*, the divorce occurred because my ex-wife was not happy and elected to divorce presumably and expressible to pursue her happiness.

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Did she not realize that this pursuit was doomed from the beginning; did she not realize that happiness is momentary and conditional—often predicated on events occurring over a relative instant of time? For example, she used to get very happy when her college ball team won a game—which was often. But let them lose on that rare exception and the effect was the extreme. I know that it's a role-reversal (the woman being the sport's nut), but the example serves to describe the whimsical and conditional nature of happiness.

I don't know if she will find happiness but, as I have been discarded as the cause for her unhappiness, I hope she someday will truly find what she evidently and desperately wants. We all hope she does! At the same time, I must continue to wonder how my children are doing—and how they are coping with the *furious winds, demarcations* and conditions for her happiness.

... *I must
continue to
wonder how my
children are
doing...*

When we went to court the first time (for a divorce hearing), I had an attorney that had been referred to me by, of all people, the pastor of our church. The pastor had well advised me, I'm sure—although my reluctance was the hope that the marriage could be saved, and the reality that our finances had been ransacked by my wife. Still, dealing with creditors was relatively simple compared with the very real possibility that I was about to lose my family.

In the months *leading-up* to the divorce, she had withdrawn from our church. Within the church, an apparent friend had first entered her life while we lived in Florida: Within the church, an apparent friend had first entered her life while we lived in Florida: the daughter of one of our neighbor's (in

Florida), she shared a similar family size and situation; a person that was trying to become a friend, but cut-off...as all other church ties.

Cutting-off relationships—to include family—was not unusual but, as I've described, was another method or *device* of control. I could not force her to return to church, to *shore-up* or reconcile with her friends, or to do much of anything. I had asked her to move from Florida to Georgia; and now, for a second time, she was proving it more than she was capable of doing. It was northeast Florida or nowhere; it was within shouting distance to her mother—whatever the cause for shouting—or nothing else. Of course, she also cut-off our relationship too; but ours is not the last....

I have tried to excuse my profession (an engineer) as being

*My only claims
pertain to
marriage of
fourteen years
and....*

nothing in the way of a counselor when it comes to people and their problems. My only claims pertain to this marriage of fourteen years and the bits & pieces of wisdom and understanding that ideally has occurred through both failure and friendship. On this recurring reservation is the related risk

to say something that is *beyond my years*—and could be completely wrong.

When I desired to move to Georgia for the first time, it was for a job; and when I desired to move a second and final time, it was for a job too? But there was also some anticipated benefit for her and for the children. The children would be geographically closer to my parents who had been very active in their lives. The closeness of family was important to me (as it was for my wife); but the difference was that her mother and step-father

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were not nearly as able (or willing) to care for the children and to spend time doing *meaningful things* with them. I saw the move to Atlanta as very beneficial to the children by association with my own experience with my grandparents and paternal family. In the end (or shortly after the divorce), the “terms and conditions” would be re-instated that all-roads end in northeast Florida; anywhere else is nowhere. Her eventual return to Florida was inevitable.

During her *flight* back to Florida, our financial status *went south* along with her: she borrowed \$11,000 from an equity account that we had set-up; and what’s more, she liquidated our checking account. Not bad for an accountant, don’t you think?

In the months to come—and after her return (to our residence) at her own volition—she was never ask to account for these monies. I did not press her because of the tenuous nature of our relationship and the likelihood that most of the “borrowed” funds had been expended on an attorney and her living expenses in Florida. It may seem passive and irresponsible to have avoided the issue, but my prevailing desire to save the marriage and reassure the children was more important at the moment. A *recovery plan* or any possible response to this enormous spending was not yet eminent.

During that summer (of “her return”), my wife re-assured me that her intention of divorce—though still pending—was not going to be carried-out. Yep, you guessed it! I believed her or, should I say, that I desperately wanted to believe her.

On her return, she also expressed the desire to get re-certified as a CPA—and indicated that she would need additional help with the children. Yep, you guessed it! I offered to help and thus, spent many a weekend caring for and doing things singularly with the children. She studied for the CPA and made

final preparations for her divorce—all under the guise of good intentions and marital faithfulness. Any number of sayings may come to mind, such as: *all's fair in love and war* or *love is blind*; but *I'll just stop there.*

*...she... made
final
preparation for
her divorce...*

Her last opportunity to follow-through with her intention of divorce came in September. While traveling on business in Philadelphia, I received a call from her attorney: informing me that my wife and children were temporarily living in a hotel, the attorney made “the suggestion” that I move out of the house such that my children could return. Yep, you guessed it! I moved out of the house so that my children could return to their rooms, their house and some stability, if possible. Two weeks later, the divorce happened—contrary to what my wife has said that summer. Oh, and did I mention that, in my wanting to believe her, that I relieved my attorney? I know; another of those “sayings”: *a fool is born every day.*

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Thus, I went to my divorce trial without an attorney—and with only a type-written, self-composed letter to the judge. In the closing of this chapter, I (the fool) share a condensed version of the letter with you.

The development and well-being of the children have and continue to be of primary importance to me. Of particular need is that they remain together, and they understand to the degree possible, that they are blameless.

As a father, I have been actively involved in the children's lives to include church, scouting, school and home.

As my children will attest, I talk to them, read to them and prayer with them during the week. In the words of one of Vicki's friends, "I have been more involved with the children than most fathers."

More of the letter:

My interest and involvement with my children have been for two reasons: I love the children dearly and want to be actively involved in their development; I love their mother and enjoy giving her as much free-time as possible. ..my interest and sense of responsibility will not change.

In the continuing and exhaustive content of this letter (or testimony), I discuss the history of our conflict and my impression and understanding of her behavior or anger. As having read this document since that time, I realize that *my heart was broken* and that I too, was angry—not because of some unresolved matters pertaining to my mother (and father), but because I did not want to be a part of the present tragedy.

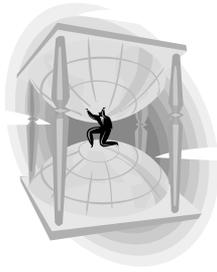
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In the closing statement, and again with some abbreviation, the following:

My love for her remains true, and as I indicated in the hearing in April, I do not agree with divorce simply because I do not believe that there are grounds for divorce. However I do believe that her anger, as manifested in her noted actions, is beyond my complete understanding and ability to help....

Although she sees this divorce as her gateway to a better, happier life, the contrary will occur. She will be working full-time and carrying the bulk of the parenting responsibilities—of which she has not had to do previously. I believe that her circumstance will only exacerbate her behavior and that anger, now directed ostensibly at me, will be diverted to the children in some form over a period of time.

There is a *fine line* between love and foolishness; indeed, the saying that *love is blind* does have some connotation to foolishness. My reason and rationale for choosing to believe my wife (at the time) was because of love for her and a desire for the marriage to last. Some may argue that I *went too far*—and that I should have been more assertive—and perhaps they might be right. But with children involved, this war called divorce—*The Mess*—is a delicate matter that sometimes warrants placid (rather than punitive) principals, and trust that God honors our choice just as God honors marriage as a covenant.



World Weighing

“However researchers have shown that one of the best determinants of a child’s adjustment to divorce is the extent of the father’s continuing involvement.”

- Edward Teyber, “Helping Children Cope with Divorce

My world had changed and, if you don’t already realize it, for the worse. Divorce is like a death except it occurs over and over again. The lives of these folks live-on; once a parent with all the privilege has changed for the worse. Even before realizing the full extent or trauma of this death was the very deep financial or economic problems.

To begin with the division of assets, the newest vehicle (and the loan) became my property; but as I will share, this joint loan became a problem indeed. For now, let me say that some months following (post-divorce), this vehicle would have to be parked because I would be unable to get it registered in another state. Just bear-in-mind, when someone has co-signed on a loan and suddenly does not like you, your loan can be leverage for exacting their dislike.

Besides taking the newest vehicle, I took only my clothes, a few tools and some books; the house and all the furnishings went to her (and to my children). This property included items given to us by my parents and other members of my family. The house, which has been solely in my name (at her prior request),

was now transferred to her via a *quit claim deed*. Remember all the debt she accumulated? Yep, it became *my baby*! In addition, I would maintain health insurance for the children and life insurance policies for her; more than I could pay or afford on my income... and with child support.

Each child was valued by *The State* as a standard \$350 per month; and although I consider them worth a lot more, who is going to argue with *The State*? Thus my monthly outlay included \$1400, health insurance, life insurance, a car note, and the debt described earlier as due her. Not fully employed at the time, she would also be able to claim all the children on her taxes for that year and for all future years.

Instead of continuing *down this road* of losses, I will stop now and repeat that the loss of my children was (or has been) far greater than all other losses as described above—or experienced since that time. Divorce is not a *highway to happiness* (as perhaps thought by my wife at the time), but it is the beginning (not the end) of a dying process; it is the admission by one spouse to give-up on life together, cash-in all the time and effort, and attempt to live or survive in the aftermath. Is it possible? Evidently, it is possible to live; but what about happiness?

How does one go from being a regular and active father to being regulated by *The State*? How does one go from accessible and able to help his children—even if they aren't sure they need help—to being undesirably disparate? At the time of the divorce, my four children ranged in ages from four to eleven. I believed that they needed a father; but I was now regulated by a state as though we were part of an institution or corporation.

As a related concern of mine, *The State* has never been able to muster the passion of being a parent—and it is ill-equipped to do so. To intercede with the unjustified dismissal of a child's

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parent—as was done in my case—is a direct assault on the family. When parents do not act as parents by being responsible for their children—or invite *The State* into their homes—they (or that person) are inviting disaster. The state is not a surrogate parent and, to say it again, “it is ill-equipped to do so.”

In my changed role from a parent to a babysitter, our lives (the family) were not the same. If one or more of my children expressed concern or confrontation with another, what could I do? I was not there to impose the parental duty of interceding with the aim of resolving the matter; but all I could do was listen and make some tacit effort at trying to support them in the weekend allocated by *The State*. If it sounds as though I’m trying to blame the legal community—the courts and *The State* in general—I have accurately expressed my view. Divorce is an industry that has besieged the family; and the legal community has profited while the children continue to suffer the most.

The concept of “two worlds” can characterize the life of a so-called non-custodial parent. One world being the “old world” where dad or father existed and was an integral part of the family; the other is a frightening world where he is alone most of the time, while in shock over the entire divorce and its losses. If there is such a thing as depression and despair, I experienced it during the months leading-up to and following the divorce. Insomnia, constant and uncontrollable thoughts and a deep sense of loss were among the conditions of my life. Was I depressed? Yes, I was very much so and, what’s worse, was determined to do nothing immediately for it.

The concept of two worlds can characterize the life...

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Besides the depression was the utter shame. No one in my immediate family had ever been divorced, and to be “that one”, was very shameful for me. I felt ashamed around my family and my brother whom I lived with for several months. I felt ashamed *before* the church that she and I had attended as a family. Perhaps indistinctly mixed with guilt, my feelings were that of failure to my children, my family, and God.

In the depression, was I ever suicidal; or in other words, did I ever think about *taking my life*? I’m not sure if I ever pondered this act but, honestly, I did not care whether I lived or died; for to me, death had already taken place—and it seemed to be worse as disbelief gave way to shock...and then reality.

Within months, I was laid-off from my employer. Though it doesn’t really matter, the lay-off was a business downturn and affected a percentage of the employment; but the loss was yet another on top of the monumental loss of marriage and family. In a sort of battle-hardened disbelief, I met with my manager for breakfast and got the bad news. I thanked him for everything, accepted his well-wishes and post-employment assistance, and left for the last time. As bad as it may sound, his treatment of my dismissal was *worlds ahead* of the treatment received by the courts. He (or the company) treated me with dignity and respect—which was immensely better than the experience of divorce. Need I go on except to say that being “fired from my family” was more difficult than anything I’ve ever gone through.

If I could have made a mistake at this time, it was a “rebound relationship”; only months following the divorce, I met (or re-met) a woman that I went to high-school with. I was in no position to be dating—let alone a serious relationship—but with some rationalization in view of my losses, I *jumped headlong* into it. It lasted a few months; and perhaps realizing that there was *better*

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fish in the sea, she moved on...to another fish. I regret having jumped into a relationship because, for one, it was wrong *before* God. The relationship was pursued on the basis that it could fix my hurt and pain or, at the least, make me feel better about myself; but all it did was cause further hurt to me (and possibly to her too). I also regret that it may have hurt my children to see me with another woman so soon after the marriage. Yes, I made a critical mistake—and have not forgotten it.

Unemployed and living in my parents' home was an adjustment for both of us. My children continued to live in our home (I mean, "their world") in Georgia, while I commuted every other week from Alabama to honor what little time I given with them.

As far as child support, the obligations were financed now with retirement. What I had not planned for was a massive tax liability. My withholding for the prior year had been arranged with the children as exemptions; but now, under the terms of the divorce, I was filing without any of the children. My tax liability had gone from a pre-determined net zero to a whopping \$9,000! In perhaps the only time my ex-wife was supportive, she offered two of the four children—which reduced my liability to just over \$5,000. With this "act of mercy" came the ability to continue my child support until re-employed in the months to come. I am quite certain that the other two children did not have any bearing on her tax liability (all things considered); still, her decision gave me the ability to continue my child support until re-employed in the months to come.

Life was hard for me—with *The Mess*—but so much harder for my children. They may “seem” adaptive or flexible, but the truth of the matter is that such a crisis as divorce does not really manifest until much later in their lives. I hope and pray that they do not suffer beyond what has already occurred; but reading

and understanding gained through research suggest that the worst may be yet to come.

In keeping with my ongoing concern for them (the children) is the strong belief....

In keeping with my ongoing concern for them is the strong belief that much has to do with their future relationships; and in those relationships, with their prevailing memory and experience of divorce. Though it may

sound like *a broken record* (to use a dated term), the concern is very real and is worthy for repeating. It is not only about me or about my children, but as is understood, is about a social problem or crisis of our culture. In his book, *Life without Father*, David Popenoe describes the culture in conjunction with fatherhood:

The end result of many cultural, social, and economic trends we have discussed is a society surprisingly unsupportive of fatherhood. Indeed, if one were specifically to design a culture and a social system for the express purpose of undercutting fatherhood and men’s contribution to family life, our current society would be close to what would result.

(50)

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He elaborates on “key elements” of the “culture or social system”:

Consider the following key elements one would want to incorporate:

1. Make marriage into a weak institution. Say that marriage is just a piece of paper...Replace the phrase, “till death do us part” with “so long as I am happy.”
2. Sexualize the society. Emphasize sex as often as possible in the media and popular culture...
3. Institute an educational system that disregards the fact that childrearing is a major adult responsibility and that marriage is important to childrearing.
4. Have an economic system that does not recognize worker’s family responsibilities and that stresses ever-increasing material consumption.
5. Develop a culture that heavily stresses individualism. As the primary goal of life, promote individual freedom and self-fulfillment rather than social responsibility and obligation...
6. In social discourse, through the media, and in the design of the built environment, de-emphasize the importance of children to the continuation of society.
7. Overlook the importance of fathering when discussing gender roles.
8. When fathering is discussed, don’t mention that fathers are unique and irreplaceable as protectors, disciplinarians, and guides...

From almost every social and cultural perspective, fatherhood has been made not only increasingly difficult but often seemingly superfluous and unnecessary. (48-50)

Understand that this is not about men, not about fathers or dads, and not just about the male gender; but it is about our culture and the changing conditions that have undermined and is destroying marriage, family and, yes, even children!

He continues on this note, with the ever dissolving “post-nuclear family”:

The disturbing reality is that the post-nuclear family appears to be inherently unstable. With other relatives already out of the family picture, women cannot be expected to do the job of childrearing all by themselves. *The State* can help economically but not socially. Without fathers, parental investments – the sine qua non of good childrearing – are ever in shorter supply. Moreover the men who are released from family responsibilities have a higher propensity for antisocial behavior.... (159)

The possibility that men are being driven from the families (in some cases) ushers in the *chicken & egg* dilemma to the question: “Where have all the fathers gone?” Did they leave entirely because they are inherently irresponsible to their families; or could there be other reasons affiliated with divorce and the demise of the conventional family? I

think there are “other reasons”; I am sure of it!

*A man that is
pressured ...
“No -man’s
land.”*

A man (a once husband, but always father) that is pressured between the figurative “two worlds” is in, what my grandfather use to say, “No-man’s land.” He has lost his accessibility to his

children, and is now under the jurisdiction of *The State* and the mercy of his ex-wife; he has lost his authority in his household and with children; and he lost his ability to sustain a living because of the daunting debt levied on him in the form of child support and post-divorce obligations. He is not *caught between a rock and hard place*; but is more likely lost between two worlds—the one he cannot forget and the other he does not know

World Weighing

anything about. Worst than a “nowhere man”, he is a *has-been* father that in some cases did nothing to warrant the gender-prejudice and bias of the courts. He has all the weight of both worlds upon him to the degree that he is up to ten times more likely to commit suicide than the female partner of this broken relationship. And the children suffer too.

In his book, *Fatherless America*, David Blankenhorn describes the plight of the non-custodial parent:

Divorce, almost by definition, destroys this basis or effective paternity. Indeed, in most cases, divorce does not simply end the parental alliance. Divorce inverts the alliance, turning mutualism into adverseness. For after divorce, according to Robert Weiss, “most custodial parents find non-custodial parents more nearly a burden than a resource.” The visiting father becomes “someone to worry about, an obligation that limits what can be done on a weekend, a source of distraction and disturbance to the children.”

The second debilitating feature of the visiting relationship is the absence of co-residency with children. To be a good-enough father—to sustain the daily effective parenting—a man needs to live with his children. When he does not, he literally becomes an outsider.

David Blankenhorn continues:

Here is the bottom line for the Visiting Father: the end of co-residency and the rupture of the parental alliance mean nothing less the collapse of paternal fatherhood, a simulacrum of paternal capacity. (156)

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As I have posed the question before, “What about the children?” Continuing on this subject in the classic study, *Second Chances*, the following on children of divorce:

Loyalty conflicts, sometimes flipping from one parent to the other and back again, are a common experience for children of divorce...

Many children feel guilty, and some feel that it is their duty to mend the marriage.... (13)

Continuing with *Second Chances*:

The devastation children feel at divorce is similar to the way they feel when a parent dies suddenly, for each experience disrupts close family relationships. Each weakens the protection of the family; each begins with an acute crisis followed by disequilibrium that may last several years or longer; and each introduces a chain of long-lasting changes that are not predictable at the onset. But divorce may well be a more difficult tragedy for the child to master psychologically...One can not predict long-term effects of divorce on children from how they react at the outset. (29)

Not that enough has already been said (because enough will never be said), but Robert Warshak writes in his book, *The Custody Revolution*:

The situation is appalling and getting worse; our record-high divorce rate creates new victims daily, but no new solutions. As the worst battle scars are born by the children. Mental Health experts agree: one of the leading causes of emotional problems in children of divorce is the diminished contact with their fathers. (17)

World Weighing

“Where have all the father’s gone?” Have they gone between worlds, everyone? *When will they ever learn....when will we ever learn...and what have the children learned?* They too are hemmed between *two worlds*; the one world where they spent much time with their father and paternal family, and the other world where those folks have been profiled as to be feared....



Debt Deserting

If finances were ever a problem, it was now; having been obligated to the pre-divorce debt and the loss of most marital assets. If only there was a 'line in the sand', but like sand in the desert, the debt seemed endless...

Like sand in a desert, debt was *the lot* of this divorcee. Debt was born, or largely accrued, by the exploits of my now ex-wife; but, as already described, I bore the penalties. Debt was incurred through the unforeseen or unrealized tax status change—which gave the full tax credit of all the children to her. Debt was also transferred to my sole responsibility for the car note; and though it was the one thing of value that I took from the divorce, it ended-up being an *albatross* because she would not agree to authorize title transfer for re-registration in another state.

Living in the adjoining state at the time, vehicle registration required a transfer with signatures of the owner(s). Under the provisions or instructions of the Final Judgment, I was to re-finance the vehicle as possible or feasible; but with registration occurring so quickly (after the divorce)—and only being re-employed for a few weeks—I was not able. The registration was due and, as a matter of practicality, I needed my ex-wife to authorize the transfer. But before I continue with this “next

hurdle” in the post-divorce life, let me share a similar story—though with roles somewhat reversed.

Only weeks after our divorce, my ex-wife called to tell that me that our mini-van (excuse me, her...) mini-van was not working—that she had stalled nearby. On hearing the news, I drove to the location and replaced the broken serpentine belt. Back in operation, the van was otherwise in good working order. But this was not the first time that I had come through with a repair during the course of her divorce.

Between the time of her “final decision” (or after telling me that she was not going to divorce me) and “D-day” (the day of divorce), the car was experiencing another problem; and, as the first of two acts of road-side service, I went over to her house (excuse me, our “marital residence”) to do a good deed. Sometime after my arrival, the local police showed-up in response to her call. Bear-in-mind that there was not a restraining order in-effect in Georgia (or where we were living); the restraining order has been filed in Florida months earlier. The police were naturally confused as to why I was repairing the car while purportedly putting my family at risk; but wouldn’t you be—wouldn’t anybody...? I explained that she called me on the matter; but in their confusion, a team of one female and one male officer politely ask me if I would leave so as to alleviate any problem.

I left; but the problem persisted...and still does. By “problem”, what I mean is hype—that migrates to lies—in order to pose as a victim of one sort on another. If I haven’t said it already, this behavior or practice is what I’ve called: “abusing *The System* designed to help the abused”; other terms that may have been (or will be) applied include: “Recurring Themes”; “The Ruse”; “Devices” and maybe, “Much Ado about Dodo “.

Debt Deserting

Why would I try a second a time to help after having been *burned* the first time; or as I like to frame it, why would I do anything to directly or indirectly help my children? Yes, that's why I have taken such risks amid the repeated (or recurring) themes of alleged victimization. It's for the children's sake! Do you hear me? Everything at this point of the marriage was for the benefit of my children—who neither understood (nor agreed to) divorce. Let's consider who the victims were (and are)—and let's consider why they're victims. I will return to these questions or subject at a later time; and I will explain how their mother, who claims to love them, has used the children *like pawns*.

Within a few weeks of the second repair (of the van), the vehicle was being traded-in by her. Did I mention that the van was in both our names too? So, she calls me at work and politely ask me if I would *head-on down* to Auto-Nation and co-sign the title of the van for her new vehicle. What do you think I did? It's for the children....

*What do you
think I did?
It's for the
children...*

Back to the vehicle that I owned (so to speak); in June of 2001, I received a letter from her attorney—a reply to my request for her co-signature to re-register. The letter included her refusal to co-sign—or otherwise, to authorize the registration:

I (the attorney) have reviewed the circumstances of the Mercury....

However until or unless she is off the loan, we are not willing to transfer the title of this vehicle to you or to anyone else.

The divorce decree contemplated refinancing or paying off this debt. When that occurs....

Not that it matters at this time, since the ordeal is long over with, but for posterity and my continued view of the legal community, the Final Judgment in “actual terms” ...regarding the Mercury:

The Husband shall make a good faith effort to refinance the Mercury....In the event that refinancing would cause great hardship the Husband shall so document the hardship to the Wife.

She could have done *the right thing*; she could have authorized the registration to enable use of the vehicle. I chose to do *the right thing*; but she chose not to....

During the time in question, I had paid over \$5,000 in taxes—which was paid entirely from my remaining retirement account. What’s more, I was only day’s into re-employment—thus making qualification for a loan (or re-financing) impossible at the time. She was well-aware of these circumstances (and the terms of the decree) on the matter of re-financing. The basis for this refusal was the potential liability that she would incur should I default on the car note. In marriage, we had never defaulted on a car loan. What benefit or purpose would default provide to me? I was re-employed; and the loan in good standing...and would remain so over the next four months—while the car remained parked and I borrowed my parent’s car to drive to work and to Atlanta to see my children. With the help of a local credit union and a sympathetic bank officer, I was finally able to re-finance and to register the vehicle without her cosigning.

Perhaps I have not done a good job of explaining the details of this feature of my debt, but the upshot is this: the attorney’s reply had nothing to do with liability or default, but was simply another opportunity to make life more difficult for a divorced dad. My ex-wife could have signed the document to enable me

Debt Deserting

to register and use the car; her choice (or reply) not to sign was simply out of maliciousness and nothing else. Once, twice, three times, I was *there* to service the vehicle and to co-sign for her car purchase. With a similar need to register my car, she was *not there*. As for the children, I will also *be there*—as providence allows....

Debt, debt and still more debt: after three years into our divorce, she *takes me back* to court for more child support. During this period, my income had increased about 17 percent. A marginal increase in child support may have been reasonable; but what occurred was an increase of 54 percent or from \$1400 to \$2160 per month! Yes, her attorney and her judge (excuse me, the judge) raised my child support to the maximum allowable rate—which was 60 percent of my after-tax income. I did not receive any tax credit for my children but, from my net income, 60 percent went to child support. I know, I know; but please remember, “It’s for the children’s sake”.

...please remember, “It’s for the children’s sake.”

Besides the radical increase in child support was: “the creation” of some back-due or arrears, some *late-breaking* out-of-pocket medical expenses that she claimed and, as well, the outstanding balance of the debt *attached* to the house in Georgia. Let me address the last item first...and the first item last.

Just over a year after “her divorce”, my ex-wife decided to move back to Florida; and having to provide a reason, she subsequently informed her judge (excuse me, the judge) that, as a CPA, she could not find employment in Atlanta. With her alibi post-entered (several months following her move), she was *free-and-clear* to resume life back in Florida—where the aging

restraining order *sat quietly waiting* to be resurrected on command of the voice of the “victim”.

Florida was ideal: it enabled her to be closer to her family, and it provided the full backing of the courts—where precedence had been established for her victim status. Returning to her hometown was never a consideration (for me), but was certain—given the inevitable and indomitable relationship between her and her mother. She was able to return under the dubious honor of being yet another victim of an already deeply victimized family; and with the *open-arms* and empathy of some—who knew all too well, the vile acts of men. A few family members may have thought otherwise had they been at the divorce trial; or if in court, they would have seen another side...that was anything but a *real victim*. Yes, there (at court), good-Christian virtue would have been tested to the point of re-considering the tenet that *blood runs thicker than water*.

You may recall the *quit deed*. In the decision to return to Florida, she decided to sell the house. The debt that she accumulated through a second mortgage—as described in previous chapters—was now retired through the proceeds. You may recall that I was given liability for that debt. From the divorce until the sell of the house, I had paid on the loan reducing the balance. In settling this matter, she tacked on the balance to alleged back-due medical expenses for the sum of approximately \$15,000. Her judge (I’m sorry, again the judge...) levied the total as a one-sum bill due within four months of the court appearance and judgment.

I could offer some details about the disclosure of my financial status; about how I could not qualify for a non-collateral loan of the amount in question. But before taking my financial status too much further, allow me to elaborate on the \$15,000.

Debt Deserting

I had been scrupulous on the out-of-pocket medical expenses. With the arrival of her bills, I would make copies and provide an itemized statement. This “system” seemed to have been working: for each batch of bills that she forwarded by mail, she received a money order and statement. Ironically, “the accountant” was the least organized—with the bills arriving in a bundle of paper. The precautionary “system” was just another extreme that a non-custodial may take in an attempt to *ward-off* the “black magic” of those attorneys (and accountants). I describe the “system” to submit that—until the time leading-up to the court appearance or child support modification—I had every reason to believe that the account was in good standing. In other words, I had no reply from her as to any outstanding or unpaid out-of-pocket expenses.

Low and behold, she now alleged that I was delinquent by thousands of dollars—of which she now had organized and complied into a reasonable package for the court. Oh, and did I mention that the courts—which order a full-discloser of financials—seemingly gave little attention or credence to the details. Yep, they *took* her package... without considering the two years of statements and correspondence that I had maintained in earnest.

As you may have had the misfortune of divorce (or similar trauma), a financial disclosure is customary in the extortion (excuse me, “division...”) of assets. So too are these disclosures required in subsequent shakedowns (excuse me, “modifications...”) of child support and other ritualistic sacrifices offered to the *goddess of victimization*. If you have not had the misfortune, then perhaps you can imagine it as somewhat like the ceremonies of some ancient tribe where, not once but repeatedly, a sacrifice is offered for appeasement (not atonement).

Remember though, that happiness can never be achieved through the expectations levied on another; such a notion is not *doomed to fail*—but is just doomed! Happiness can never be achieved through the distress or destruction that one imposes on the other person. When a child, now grown-up, does not resolve their deep-seeded anger with a parent or parents, the “other person” *plays Hell* trying to make-up for it. Married, divorced or dead, the “other person” can never replace what was lost so much earlier in the life and soul of the oppressed. Forgiveness must be the course for any future, substantive relationships.

I know, I know; it was perfectly legal for her to collect on this second mortgage debt. In my simple mind is the realization that I gave her the house; she decided to sell—and accept a loss—and the second mortgage debt was her doing.... Again, she created the vast majority of this debt, or \$11,000 dollars ostensibly to finance her divorce. I had paid some of this debt post-divorce, but now she wanted the rest of it. The problem was that I did not have the money to pay the \$15,000, and I did not have the collateral to bower the amount! But of course, her attorney and her judge (excuse me, the judge) knew that I did not have the means—presuming that they considered the disclosure of my personal finances. Though such disclosure is customary, the process is lost or broken by my observations and experiences of the courts.

*Life is
wonderful when
the law works in
your favor...*

At the time of this “reconciling of accounts”, I had not seen my children in about three years. Yes, that’s right; on her return to *the land of restraining orders*, a voice of *the victim* roused the resting restraining order to resurrection; thus making it illegal for me to be a parent to my children. Life is

Debt Deserting

wonderful when the law works in your favor; when you call-up the compliant courts with little or no cause—other than what you testify...regardless of the truth. But I wouldn't know because, to begin, I have learned that telling the truth is foremost. As Mark Twain said, "Telling the truth (or being honest) is best; that way, you don't have to remember anything."

Several years after my estrangement from my children (or the alienation), the courts re-commenced with the ceremonial, sacrificial rights of the modification and post-divorce sacrifice: my offering or duty was to pay my now-levied debt without any possibility of an installment plan—or without a reasonable consideration of my financial status. Let's think about this situation; let's do what the courts do not do. They knew that I could not pay, yet they (the courts) proceeded with such terms anyway. They did the victim's bidding.

Rather than face the consequences of this debt service, I filed for bankruptcy (Chapter 7) in the weeks to come. I didn't want to do this because, for one thing, it cost me nearly a \$1,000. What could I do; what would you do? Bankruptcy was the only recourse to debt unserviceable.

"Debt Deserting" insinuate the endless losses (like the sand of the desert). "Deserting" began with the borrowing of the large sum of money (from a joint account). Incidentally, this withdrawal would have required two signatures—two valid signatures! These losses continued with a series of lies to include her basis for her restraining orders, the initial cause or basis for her divorce, and that used to inculcate the children's understanding both prior to and post the divorce. These losses continue at the writing of these words—and will continue so long as fear and control are the motivation. How can a relationship predicated on fear be in the best interest of our children?



Castle Keeping

With what vestige of authority I thought I still had, the castle was kept intact during the months empty of a family. In the end, even it was given-up or given-over for the sake of the children.

Who came up with the saying, “A house is a man’s castle?” Maybe it was knight or warrior, but certainly not the captive locked away in the dungeon. If his house is (or was) his castle, the non-custodial man has long abdicated his apparent throne. Being a non-custodial is not honorable or noble—but only degrading and disgusting. The once and former parent becomes increasingly less important or significant in his children’s lives.

The castle was of no consequence to me; I did not care about a piece of property (or brick and mortar). Contrary to the sentiment of Mr. O’Hara (from *Gone with the Wind*), it’s *not about the land*, but it is about the love that exist between parent and child. When that love is undermined by both the custodial parent and the court system, the once-parent might as well understand that his authority or his privilege is gone. Yes, it’s all gone; it’s *gone with the wind*.

When my oldest son was young, he liked castles and knights. On several occasions, the kids and I went to medieval festivals. From his reading, such as the children’s series of King Arthur, young Matt developed his interest. His room was decorated with

a crescent, sword and chain-ball acquired from one of my grandmothers. Other decorative include this rugged, dark-oak furniture. His room was his kingdom, and his mind was a place where he could associate the images and memories of the festivals to the words or images of his texts. Whether authentic or real, these medieval times had some degree of honor or nobility. Yes, there was clearly evil and mysticism amid the themes, but there was also good and brotherly love working in opposition. In the mind of a child was perhaps the regality of the warrior, the chivalry of the knight or some similar “good” found in a quest or kingdom.

When he was even younger, my oldest received a set of plastic armor: the *breastplate of righteousness*, the *belt of truth*, and other accoutrements were probably the first of many influences in his developing interest and intrigue. One other item worth mentioning was a small book that included transparencies of the castle; from the moat, through the portcullis, and to the spiraling steps of the keep. Whenever we visited one of the masonry forts along the southeastern coast (Fort Pulaski and Fort Clinch), he had a frame-of-reference for which to consider the architecture and placements. Maybe too, he took the features of these real structures and used them to bring to life the castles in the books.

As the mind of this child (and all my children) is considered by their father, effort has been made to try to know who they are and how they are doing. The days of living in the home (or castle) are long gone and, by way of the modern tyrants that ravage families, my children have been indentured to a system that does not care. The figurative days of wonderful relationship and the kingdom that we were constructing has given forth to dark, evil, and mystic powers of the courts. We were free—not slaves of a tyrant....

Castle Keeping

Shortly after my position was abdicated (or the divorce was final), my ex-wife had a security system installed in our house (her house). On the rare occasion that she compromised the *cardinal rule* and ask me to pick-up my children at my former dwelling, I would consider the security system as like most security systems in cars: it is activated most often through the owner's carelessness. Why would I burglarize or invade my own home, my own children, and my once own-family? Given the incident of the car repair (and her calling the police), I should not have been surprised to see the security system as just another "mysticism amid the themes."

I have described the children (and my family) as the greatest single loss of my life. Any one of us can look back in our lives and assess our losses, but ideally, should find solace in knowing that losses enable us to appreciate what we have...and sometimes take for granted. I miss being married and having the companionship and sense of unity that a family offers; but more than that, I regret that love and marriage are not as valued and honored in *the present day* and, in correlation to that, that husbands and fathers are losing their once-acknowledged respect and dignity. I am grieved for my children—and boy's in particular—that this *modern age* is emasculating men under the guise of "the best interest of the children".

Not *with might*—but right is the reason for men to continue to challenge the processes aimed at damaging and destroying marriage and family. Whether fighting international impositions on the family or as a figurative fugitive of his once-family, fathers have good reason—if just to preserve their own! In my own experience and observation, the culture has become Byzantine in singling-out the male for exile—the criminalization of his legacy

A Once and Always Father

as well the pathetic portrayal of the paternal order in our contemporary media.

You should not have to *go very far* to read, research, and realize that the beliefs expressed in the last paragraph are very real. On the matter of the “visiting father” of a broken marriage, the following insights from David Blankenhorn in *Fatherless America*:

The visiting father is hard to see. He is a shadow dad, a displaced man trying not to become an ex-father. He is a father who has left the premises. He stills stops by, but he does not stay. He is on the outside looking in. No longer the man of the house, he has been largely de-fathered. He is a father once-removed. He has become a visitor. As a visitor, he is part father, part stranger. Physical distance, combined estrangement from the children’s mother, has radically diminished his paternity. Now a weekend and holiday dad, a treat father, a telephone father, he is frequently filled with resentment and remorse. He mourns the loss of his fatherhood much as one would mourn the loss of health. (148)

His effort to be father is “stacked against” him; again, from *Fatherless America*:

The evidence shows that the great majority of visiting fathers are not—Indeed, cannot be—good-enough fathers to their children. The deck is stacked against them. Too much has changed, too fast; too much will continue to change... Visiting fathers have lost the bases of the fatherhood. (150)

Castle Keeping

As to the castle, a “small civilization has died” as David Blankenhorn puts it:

For most divorcing couples, the marriage ends in bitterness, guilt, and pain. A small civilization has died. The children stay with the mother. The man moves out and tries to move on. When he does so, he may suffer enormously. He may have the best intentions about not divorcing his children. But despite these feelings, most of these men lose the essence of their fatherhood. They drift away from their children almost as surely as they move away from their former homes...This is sad. But it is the pattern. (150)

It may seem redundant or repetitive to use these references; however, the research and results are very real indeed; and with fading fatherhood being the *greatest social crisis of our time*, deserve to be repeated. The faltering of fatherhood is directly related to the failing of families; the two are inextricably linked in spite of the voices of opposition that have worked ardently to *dismantle the mantel* of responsibility, duty and obligation of a man to his family.

The Father's Rights movement is the product of this “faltering”; it is the collective outcry of the fathers (and their children) as the *causalities* of court systems—in the sense of their devaluing of the father, the bias of the judges, the greed of the attorneys, and the apathy indigenous in the balance of the judicial system. Father's have been reduced to merely a formality of the offspring of “property”—that can be taken for no justified or warranted reason.

On several occasions, my ex-wife's attorney (any one of the five or more...) would have attested to (or verbalized) “the children's best interest”. Would they be advocating such a claim if not paid? Like the slave-runners of the Atlantic (during the

1700 and 1800's), the attorney's are facilitating the crisis while skimming their cut from the profits. Sad but true, ethics and morals take a distant second for monetary gains or windfall of the dismantled dad, the fugitive, the exile.

*...ethics and
morals for ...
monetary
gains...*

Who is going to accuse the legal system of moral and ethical illegalities? As my brother once described them as “the long arm”, the courts have no

accountability to anyone; thus can impose sentences on defendants without adjudicating a sentence (and work collaboratively to meet the quotas on conviction rates)—putting justice neatly away on various placards and publications. The father (or man) does not, as one attorney blatantly admitted, “stand a chance”. Don't try to reason the so-called due-process of the courts; due-process just doesn't lend well to reasoning or logic when verdicts are rationalized through the *plea bargain*.

Quoting from an article in Wikipedia, the former-President of the American Coalition of Fathers and Children (ACFC), Stephen Baskerville, describes that “family” courts as: secretive, censoring and punitive of fathers who criticize them. I'll go further to say that, even if you have not voiced or published a criticism, the courts are “punitive” because of what you are—not who you are. He also states that the laws of today (in our “modern” society) represent civil rights' abuses and intrusive perversion of government power.

The female judge (of the divorce) became very defensive when I referred to myself as “the lesser of the two parents”. Why would I describe myself so? Because I was clearly being treated inequitably in the granting of a divorce—because of someone's

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admitted unhappiness! If the judge was to grant divorce on this expressed personal matter, wouldn't it seem equitable to say:

Very well, you want a divorce to find happiness...? You need to pack your personal affects and go seek your happiness; but the dad and the children are going to *stick around* and continue to try to make this family work.

Of course, that's not what the judge did; and what's more, she spontaneously explained her own plight as a divorced parent. I guess that mixing our personal and professional life is acceptable—even for a judge in session.

To return to Stephen Baskerville and the Father's Rights movement, another claim is that our government is engaged in a campaign against fathers and fatherhood. He describes this agenda as being used by the governments to justify their involvement in the first place. The processes can be described like this: the state governments usher in no-fault divorce and, consequently divorce sky-rockets with the majority of cases represented by a female plaintiff; and with the burgeoning break-up of families, the governments now institute federal programs to collect child-support from the disparate dads. Yes, I think he is (or they are) right; the government has engineered a social crisis to perpetuate their prosperity amid the plight of millions of children. It is like the slave-trade in some sense, where the economics—and not compassion or humanitarianism—is at the root of the problem.

*...the
government has
engineered a
social crisis...*

A Once and Always Father

In what he calls a “cultural sanctioning” or breakdown, David Popenoe describes our changing landscape in his book, *Life without Father*:

Today the cultural sanction of male fathering behavior has diminished sharply. Gone are the omnipresent controls provided by close-knit kinship groups in pre-modern societies, groups with enormous stake in the life outcomes of the biological offspring. Disappearing are the religiously based cultural controls, the internalized “virtues” of Victorian society. Even our laws have gone soft; instant divorce is now available to men (or women) in most states merely for the asking. (159)

He continues on describing this “cultural sanctioning”:

Modern cultures are in the process of declaring obsolete the age-old cultural understanding about the importance of fatherhood and the necessity for sanctions against casual paternity. This can be seen most clearly in what has happened to marriage, the key social institution found in every society that has held men to the responsibilities of fatherhood. Not so long ago, America was probably the most marrying society in the world. (159)

In the *social crisis of the day* is not only the removal of the father, but the re-definition of a family. Not only have men been driven from their families like cattle, but the impetus behind this effort has spurred a massive increase of irresponsibility in the form of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and unmarried couples. The divorce rate has stabilized in recent times but, as previously pointed-out, amid a decline in marriage. What is marriage anyway? *Stay tuned*, and the government will establish (or re-establish) this standard like they do life itself; with some arbitrary basis that

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makes absolutely no sense to convention, covenant marriage, Christian concepts or even Natural Law.

Within the same chapter, David Popenoe leaves us with an ounce of hope vested in our culture:

While the future of fatherhood looks very grim indeed, the seeds of changes and renewal lie waiting in the invisible but powerful realm called culture—the realm of values, attitudes, and beliefs.... There is always the prospect, therefore, that marriage and other cultural guidelines for men can be reclaimed and reinforced. (159)

Where does hope lie? It seems to lie in a change and improvement in our culture. For this improvement to occur, five “propositions” are tendered by David Popenoe. With each proposition, I provide my commentary and questions.

1. “Fathers have a unique and irreplaceable role to play in child development.” (159) *Statistics show that marriage and family is the best and most-ideal environment for children (and women) by and large; the conventional family is the safest haven. Why should the destruction of the family continue in such a systematic way if these statistics are verified and validated, and the underpinning of a republic or free society depend a strong family network?*
2. “Marriage and parenthood are strongly interlinked. Men need cultural pressure...and the pressure has long been marriage.” (159) *Why is marriage on the decline and the family in dire straits? Do the courts recognize the social statistics that bear-out the link between fathers and marriage; or are the courts bent on the profitable industry of divorce amid the destructive outcome to our society?*

Continuing with the propositions:

3. “The most important and enduring dimension of fathering has to do with a child’s feelings. Children need to feel recognized and accepted by the fathers; they need to feel that they are special.” (159) *Once again, the social benefits and virtues of the father-child relationship are made clear. The trouble is that precedence has been given—not to the children or the innocent—but often to the offending parent or spouse of the marriage and family. When do so-called individual rights go too far; or when does the want of the one supersede the needs of the family?*
4. “Biological fathers are more likely to be committed to the upbringing of their children than are non-biological fathers...Engaged biological fathers care profoundly and selflessly about their own children, and such fatherly love is not something that can be transferred easily or learned from a script.” (159) *I cannot answer for other biological fathers, but for this one, David is right-on! Biological or natural fathers pose the safest circumstances for their young. Other adults in the household—who have no natural relations—are at higher risk of abuse or neglect in any or all forms.*

In my comments and criticisms toward the government, I am not suggesting that such an institution can fix this social crisis.

Personally, I don't have any confidence in...

Personally, I don’t have any confidence in the government, the courts and cadre of divorce attorneys responsible in part for the crisis. As with any institution, blame or discredit cannot be levied on a personal level—but must be addressed

at the institution, the motive and purpose behind such laws and court conduct.

“Castle Keeping” has all the imaginary of something tangible and secure, with the added connotation of service and vigilance.

Castle Keeping

“Castle Keeping” is not about the structure or property, but more about society and culture as it views or defines the family and fatherhood. In the “service and vigilance” is the gatekeeper or watchtower to warn of potential or real threats, and to stand ready to defend and sacrifice as necessary; not a sacrifice (or sacrifices) that devalue marriage and dismember families, but the sacrifice under girded with compassion and care.

Now, the once-member of this imaginary castle stands outside the gate—rather than at the watchtower—and waits for his children to ask, “Friend of Foe?”



Foe Befriending

One of the hardest moments in our visitation was learning of the expressed “abandonment” by dad. I had tried to save the marriage and had done nothing to resemble abandonment. Then there were the children....

In the *days of yore*, the gate-keeper’s question may have been “Friend or Foe?” A non-custodial may be ask a similar question (or the thought may occur)—as I sometimes felt like an enemy or adversary at *ye-old castle*. But this feeling was not without reason, as I (and my children) soon began to experience the breach of living in *two worlds*—where the other world has other views that often are expressed around (or perhaps to) other people—and even my children. Living as an exile or fugitive was bad enough; but according to my children, I had “abandoned” them!

In the first week of September, while commuting with the children from Georgia to Alabama, my eight year old daughter asked me, “Dad, why have you abandoned us?” My immediate reaction was anger. I knew that she had not contrived such a question—with the use of this word “abandoned”—but had heard (or been told) such. Anger toward my ex-wife was one side of my reaction, but sorrow was the other. Such a question (from my daughter) is loaded with the kind of *programming* highly criticized by the sources I’ve read and the counseling (post-divorce) that

I've received. *This weekend* was (and has been) particularly memorable for several reasons.

On that weekend, the kids were very frustrated; specifically, the oldest three were angry with the youngest because, as they put it, "he was getting away with murder." Of course, what they meant was that he was being mischievous—which was his character—and not being corrected for it by his mother. As I have taken much opportunity to reflect on this weekend and the post-divorce changes of my children, the source of their grievances was the changes in the home as a consequence of divorce. How does a child comprehend that his parents—once married and together—are now at odds, separated and potentially acting-out mischief of their own? How does a child process such comments that conflict with their own experience and understanding of someone so dear and important?

During the months following the divorce, my family

*My family was
very good
about...*

(paternal family) was very good about not speaking critically about (or toward) my ex-wife in front of the children. Anyone qualified in such family matters will tell you that this practice only multiplies confusion and guilt in the

child; and nothing good can come from this practice or habit. To their credit, my family were intentionally reserved in front of the children—though clearly had well-deserved criticism in view of the fact that she lied about them in attempting to profile them as abusing the children.

Besides the statement from my daughter, my cause for the memory has also to do with my behavior; and specifically, my spanking of my son for his behavior. In his frustration (and in mine...), I failed to recognize the root cause—with not only his

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brother's unchecked behavior but, more broadly, the sheer magnitude of changes that had occurred (or were occurring) to his (and his siblings) disadvantage. Can children sense such changes—as to the foreboding or potentially detrimental effect? Yes, I believe that they have the basic ability to sense danger or insecurity in light of a basis such as the presence and direct involvement of a father. Their parent was gone...and not coming back.

On that particular weekend, my son was expressing his sense of this danger or insecurity through behavior. When he fought with the other children in my home or apartment, I tried to verbally reprimand him; but his reaction was to verbally *fire-back*—and to stay in a somewhat curled-up position on one of the beds. I had never seen him like this before; so angry and antagonistic. To my stupidity, I did not realize the nature of his behavior—but saw it only as a momentary act of defiance. Refusing to obey me when I ask him to apologize (to his siblings), he was told that if he did not (apologize) that he would be spanked. He refused...and I spanked him with my hand on his buttocks. What resulted from my spanking was not compliance; Ben did not even cry or show the least amount of pain. He was too angry to do that....

This moment, this event, and Ben's behavior was memorable because of the mistake that I made in thinking that a spanking was a solution. In our marriage, or more specifically in our parenting, spanking was seldom used as form of discipline or punishment. The last time I had spanked any of the children had been my daughter who, after picking on her younger brothers, refused to apologize. First sent to her room (for time out), she still refused to acknowledge her wrong and to apologize to them. As with Ben, she received a spanking on the buttocks

with my hand—but evidently not as hard as Ben received on *this weekend* in September—for what occurred with Ben, was a bruise in the form of a silhouette of my hand on his buttocks.

Later that day, as my parents learned of the bruise (or spanking), they were upset—for they knew that as my ex-wife discovered it, she would react with extreme measures. They were right; she did respond by reporting the matter to DHR (in Georgia) and subsequently enrolling the children in counseling with an independent or private counselor. In the weeks that followed (and since that time), my visitation *was over* as long as she had anything (and everything) to do with it.

DHR completed the case in conjunction with an Alabama (or local DHR); and from my correspondence, the case was closed without any conclusive reason for child-abuse charges or modification to my child visitation privileges. If I had been guilty of child-abuse—or the agency had reason to suspect such—my visitation rights would have been suspended or revoked through a modification. As it turned out, no such modification occurred—which may have been why an independent counselor was subsequently enlisted by my ex-wife.

As to the independent counselor, a report was produced showing that the children (all the children) had suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (or Disorder). Receiving a copy of the report, though not included in the evaluation, I needed to first understand what this disorder was all about. With some tacit understanding (that included military exposed to combat), I reacted (to the report) with an attempt to learn more—with both a call and a letter.

In the report was that the disorder had caused my son to have academic challenges at school. But he already had a history of setbacks to include a summer school remedial program the

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year prior. To my recollection, his reading skills were not satisfactory and, with our approval, he was enrolled in the summer program.

As a follow-up to reading the report and learning more about the diagnosis, I attempted to call the counselor. Our conversation was not productive however, as she did not seem aware that he had been in a remedial program the prior summer. Further follow-up included a letter for which no reply was received. Below is a segment of the letter written to the counselor.

You may recall that you and I discussed the matter in a phone conversation on December 24th (2001). From your explanation, as well as a recent copy (of the report), I am of the belief that you were not of aware of my son's academic and conduct problems during Kindergarten. I say this because your assessment indicates similar problems resulting from the spanking yet, again, he was required to attend a summer program...

The letter was not to excuse my behavior, but was intended to inform her of what she seemingly was not aware (from our phone conversation).

I obviously am not learned in the matter of medicine and the complexity of disorders and other psychological or emotional conditions; but given the outcome of the report, I believed my reaction and my response to be *the right thing*. Yes, I was wrong for spanking my child and bruising his buttocks; and while I do not obviously consider spanking as completely out-of-order, the behavior of my son (and for that matter my children) did not warrant this form of discipline. What he needed—what they needed—was reassurance and encouragement; but what I could not muster was the means to offer such to them. Two weekends

out of the month is just not enough; but to be an effective parent—or parent at all—is to be readily accessible...without the restraints of a divorce decree and the authority of *The State*.

As I have taken much time to reflect, the memory of the children's changing behavior is most vivid. They had been through a great deal of distress: several months living in Florida; a temporary reunion in the subsequent summer; the divorce in the fall; and the much changing environment though physically in the same home or house.

In his book, *Father and Child Reunion*, Warren Farrell points out that The National Center for Health Statistics reports that a divorced child living with his mother is about four times more likely to need professional treatment for emotional and behavioral problems. The statistic also includes other conditions that are linked to children of post-divorce circumstances—without delineating on any adversity imposed on the children through deliberate divisiveness of the parents. Realizing the statistic is somewhat vague, it cannot be considered in detail regarding the experience of my own children during this time; but what it can do is reinforce the very real conditions and problems that emerge in the children during and following divorce.

*...a divorced
child is four
times more ...*

During the process of the divorce (in the fall of that year), both she (my ex-wife) and I were required to take a one-day course through a county agency. The course was aimed at preparing parents for the post-divorce experience (as though a one-day course was adequate). Following the course, I enrolled in an optional, multi-week program; and I enrolled the children in a program sponsored by this public agency. But to carry out

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this program, my ex-wife would have to consent. For whatever reason she decided not to involve the children; indeed, the first time she took action on counseling for them was following the spanking and DHR—which was roughly a year later.

I can offer no excuse for my spanking and bruising my son's buttocks. The discipline was more out of my frustration and losses (in their lives and mine) than anything else. Both my son's behavior and my response had a broader context; both of us were dealing with the losses of our lives together, or the post-divorce changes in the family and home. Again, I am not excusing my behavior—but am trying to establish why I did what I did when it was not my practice or behavior.

In my childhood experience (and as well with my wife) spanking was the norm. She told once of her mother “stripping her legs”, for example. I received similar discipline with a belt or switch when I was young—as did my parents before me. Spanking has become taboo; and while bruising may seem extreme, it was not unusual in my past experience whether paddled at school or spanked at home. Still, the vast majority of my bruises and other abrasions came from playing sports or riding bicycles—and not from any corporal punishment.

I was fortunate to have *come across* a picture of my son on the Internet just prior to writing this chapter; it was the only picture that I've acquired of him since the time of the spanking (or roughly eight years ago). Purportedly he is twelve years old in the picture and, sitting at a table, his elbows show bruises (unless, both elbows are dirty). I also had the chance to watch him play a *pick-up* game of football involving his younger brother (at about the same age); and based on the way that they were *going at it*, there is not any wonder that he keeps bruises...just like I did.

If parents are able to make a big mistake, I made mine when I spanked Ben. Of course, this (spanking) was not my first mistake; but it was a major mistake after the divorce. Was it extreme to spank my child as a form of punishment? I do not believe it was; but it became so just prior to the divorce (my daughter) and subsequent to the divorce. The spanking was another *device* of “mysticism amid the themes”.

During the marriage however, punishment or discipline was something that we had agreed on by and large—as to the use and type. Again, time-out was the rule in the appropriate age. Spanking could amount to a tap on the thigh. This discipline was used in particular for my youngest child who pitched temper tantrums and would writhe and buck while trying to change his messy diaper. Reluctantly, my wife would use this method short of having a *hazardous waste spill* or something worse....

One deviation from our agreed on methods (that I’m aware of) occurred while we were living in Atlanta. I came home from work to find her in a fury. Not recalling why she was angry, I discovered that she had thrown a metal trashcan at our oldest. When I arrived, he told me what had happen (the metal trash can) and I excused my wife and tried to handle the matter more calmly.

With young children, anything can happen....

My reason for recounting this matter was not to excuse spanking my son—for there is no excuse or rationale—but is to point that all parents are capable of (and indeed may) revert to some unreasonable or irrational form of discipline. I would say that throwing a metal trashcan (or similar) at anyone is beyond reason—and I’m sure my son feels the same way...or did. On balance, our method was successful (I

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thought)...until the days leading-up divorce—until the “mysticism amid the themes”.

With young children, anything can happen. In the home (or the domain) you can break-up a fight, quell a temper tantrum (unless it's your spouse), or address (or redress) some otherwise intolerable or unacceptable behavior. It is not boot-camp or some over expectant, intolerable rules and regulations; it simply trying to teach the children to share, to care (about), and to bear (with one another) feelings, interests, and personal things. It is trying to maintain or mobilize some degree of order so that everyone is collectively getting along...and even loving each other if that is possible. Children require some instruction or teaching; but for adults, such should be understood and self-directed. Of course, this “teaching or instruction” is best performed by example or modeling—rather than words. Being a parent is not easy, but it sure is a lot easier than being a non-custodial....

Living around her family was not difficult when we were childless; but when we returned to Florida (from Savannah) with children on the way, relations changed drastically. Her mother was frequently showing-up unannounced at our house and, with regularity, would create frustration in her daughter (my wife at the time). Usually armed with a bag full of sweets, the mother would quickly grab the attention (and momentary favor) of the children. For my wife however, these impromptu visits were very disconcerting—to put it mildly. Her mother would not only arrive unannounced, but presume her *command and control*. I suppose she had to justify her existence by imposing on her nearby daughter but, as a practice, she would upstage my wife with a volley of criticisms. In other words, she was not supportive—but intrusive and condescending. Oddly enough, my wife did little about it except to complain to me. Our *boat*

(figuratively speaking) was being rocked by her mother; but I was not to rock her mother's boat. *Something had to give....*

During these early years of child rearing, I was *hands-on*. As one of my wife's friends (at the time) said, "I was more active with my children (as a father) than most...." Whether that was true or not, my feeling on the matter was that after work, I should come home and help with the kids. I should help feed them, rock them and do whatever I can to help her. Of course, with the involvement, came some "wonderment" on the part of her mother. I'm not sure how she viewed my participation; but I think she would have preferred more absence—rather than assistance—from the man.

In the realm of some wonderment was an occasional need to *call the children down* while at her mother's home. Not only can my children be *in the thick of it*; but when you have cousins and other kin folk *stuffed* into close quarters, "anything can happen". If the children did not behave, they would be sent to a bedroom to *cool-down* or to simply be separated from the each other. I don't think this happened often—but it did happen. When my instructions were given in the instance, some stillness or hush would come over "the crowd" and her mother might express a look of disapproval or doubt. Even so, the children were put in time-out if a *verbal* did not work or the matter had gotten too *heated....*

The only other situation that ever drew a similar reaction was one time (and only one time) that I turned-off their television in an attempt to carry-on a conversation. Not long after my wife and I married, the condition *hit me* that they (her mother and step-father) kept their TV on round-the-clock. Yes, it never was turned off; thus, it was not inconceivable that my action (of turning it off) was the first time—at least in quite a while.

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Anyway, my turning the TV off was met with a similar hush—a kind of implied insult—as though I had made a critical remark directed at one or both of them. In the few times that I *called a child down*, a similar reaction was always to follow. I guess it was just a different set of standards or maybe a different role on the part of a parent; but I did not ever inquire... nor did my wife and I ever discuss it to my recollection.

Since that time, I have *come across* some description of an environment or lifestyle as generally described of her family. Again, my opinion or consideration is not with any credibility other than the desire to try to understand *where she came from*—and why they (or her mother, in particular) might react as described. My reading is not extensive and is not considered as anything other than a possible contribution. Drawing from my sources and with only a minimal amount of information (cited in early chapters), I will express my belief with a question or two: could their reaction—and a prevailing conscience to avoid confrontation of any kind—have been the result of living in domestic violence? Is peace or calmness so important that any misbehavior is overlooked or left unattended because of the past experience? Sometimes, momentary peace or the mandate *to just get along* is perhaps necessary; but if this desire becomes so important that misbehavior is left unattended or unaddressed, the passivity of doing nothing seems to encourage the hostility of doing anything.

*...is peace and
calmness so
important
that...*

Yes, her mother did not like confrontation—but I said nothing about criticism and *back-biting... right down to the bone*. Both her mother and her step-father could be relentless in their

own way. As described in prior chapters, the step-father made sport of his criticism toward some family members; it was his occupation in life. Her mother was sharply critical as one way of needling her way back into the lives of her children; a kind of *she-said...she-said* volley of alleged conversation that might *stir the pot...or at least keep the water warm* (but not boiling). The bevy of brutal *back-biting* was not kept from my immediate family either—as my wife seemed most affected...though unwilling to confront her mother. The eldest couple (or daughter) of the family was especially affected, as described before; and eventually established a distant relationship (socially... emotionally) though living just across the river.

I do not understand the dynamic of her family to the degree of being certain in my opinion. Passivity in the presence of many, and criticism in the company of few: a keeping of the appearance of love in the actual circumstance of competition stemming from the always-needed, but never received love of two parents. By “parents”, I don’t mean the step-father, but the two natural parents who may have loathed each other to the degree that there was *no room* or opportunity to love the children.

I have used the expression, “the orange falls close to the tree”, in prior chapters as a euphemism to allude to the condition that a mother’s behavior (in relationships) is a model for her daughter. I have also described what little I learned about the relationship with their father (or lack of relationship). To remind the reader, the relationship was potentially best-managed (or considered) with a developed desire for distance, but tolerated with the occasional—though much-dreaded—return of the dissipated and dangerous dad.

To suggest that her dad was not involved (in their lives) would be an understatement; his distance was their momentary

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benefit but their long-term disadvantage. In his book *Life without Father*, David Popenoe describes the disadvantage for just the basic condition of not being involved:

For girls whose fathers are not involved, many positive character and personality traits fail to be developed. Girls deprived of strong relationships with their fathers tend to grow up with the perception that men are irresponsible and untrustworthy. (159)

Perhaps the desire or demand for momentary peace had become a priority in the larger events of *dad's distance*. Still, the possible consequence of an uninvolved dad and a controlling mother cannot exclude the deep feelings of an “irresponsible and untrustworthy” persona of men.

I have not fully addressed (or redressed) this family dynamic with regard to what I think I know...or have learned; but intend to re-visit the matter in later chapters because of the basic belief that who we are...has much to do with who we were. I do believe that people can change for the better; but if their behavior is so ingrained as to preempt any possibility for real change, they will remain dependent on and enslaved to that which they've learned—even from childhood. To begin such change is to first recognize or identify the behavior in the first place.

I stand at the gate and wait for the question, “Friend or Foe?” I close by saying that my desire was to always be a friend; but I remain a man even so.



Ire-reflections Irritating

*If the circumstances of other men are (or were) like mine has been,
it is not any wonder why men far more often choose to end their
lives after divorce.*

What is a better time to examine one's life than with a crisis or major transition? But this process (of examination) depends on the willingness to confront the pain of our losses, and the possibility that we have had something to do with it. Glimpses or evidence of "who we are" may manifest or be more evident in what we hoped for—and even worshiped—but is now removed or torn from our lives. It is the losses of our lives that enable us to reflect on what matters...and why it matters...and who matters.

To look at ourselves is more than holding up a mirror or even asking someone, "How do I look?" It is not the physical appearance or general complexion that is *on review*; but it is the soul of our selves that has to be examined in the mirror that bears-all. However long or painful the process, the bearing of our soul is important when we have long depended on others to shape and even define us. As one of many who have been discharged from parental service, I am well aware of emptiness that comes from divorce—as one more irritating consequence or circumstance. In the consequence is the breaking—and even shattering—of the concept that "who we are..." is not altogether

“who we were...”; but that we have changed...and we are changing.

Around the year 2003, I embarked on a series of letters to (or about) my children. Grouped under the title *In a Word*, these letters collectively numbered around 350. Representing a variety of experiences, interests and spontaneous thought, *In a Word* was my first effort and writing with the potential for further healing. One of the letters used a title, “Reflections”, and the very familiar song by the same name. On this song by The Supremes, I wrote of the lover (or singer):

Ideally, the lover will *move-on* and take account in the failed relationship such that mistakes of the sort will not occur again. Such lessons in life are difficult, and near impossible; yet, anyone who commits themselves to another, whether in marriage or other, will find that hurt and suffering are just part of the sacrifice embodied in love.

As I write this chapter (and book), the “lessons” from a post-divorce life continue; that is, the consequence or circumstance of the non-custodial continues.... Looking into the figurative mirror has the positive effect of confirming the desire to *move-on*, but the negative effect of discovering or revealing the hurt that still languishes. This figurative mirror is reserved or sized for only one person—personally alone to look, examine, and realize that he is neither more nor less than a father and parent, but he is becoming somewhat of a survivor.

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Another song to add substance is from a young, Christian musician, Jon Foreman. In his piece, “A Mirror is harder to Hold”, he writes:

Please don't go, Please don't leave me alone
A mirror's so much harder to hold
I could try and point the finger, but the glass points in my
direction
Sure, you got your sharp edges, but my wounds are from my
own reflection...

And could it be; that our reflection can reveal the hurt (or wounds) while confirming our desire to know, to be honest...to know and live the truth?

The Christian life is an opportunity to be present with the truth and, in turn, to come to know the truth. This life is marked by the progressive realization that, in simple terms, the Believer is wholly in need of help—of

*The Believer is
wholly in need
of help...*

salvation and redemption from corruption of the *human heart*. In this opportunity is the further revelation that there is God...and we are not God; thus leading to the understanding and surrender to God (Christ) as our supreme savior. The Believer has the benefit of examining the *heart* (or soul) through *the lens* of God's Word and Spirit.

Though endowed with “an opportunity”, the Believer can still be figuratively blind to his sin; he can be unconcerned—even unaware—about the *log in his own eye*. This *log* (sometimes referred to as a beam) and phrase describes the hypocrite; full of pride (of the worst kind) that can diminish or disregard his own sin while concentrating on the sin of others.

Yet “an opportunity” remains present...and so too the

accountability to continue on course for the *cross of Christ* no matter what has happened or will happen in our lives. From the Bible translation; the book of 2 Corinthians, *The Message* describes the change that emerges and develops from “an opportunity”.

[There is] nothing between us and God [but] our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah; our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him. (Chapter 3)

The Believer should not fear looking into the figurative mirror, but with repeated reflection, should continue to “become like him.” As for the conditions for “an opportunity”, well, I’m just not sure that any conditions exist...other than an “understanding and surrender to God”. “An opportunity” must not be once or occasional; but it must be continuous....

I know that mirrors sometimes portray a distorted image. As one who has oversized ears, I would prefer that the mirror or glass be formed in such a way as to take the reality and reduce (or retract) these “protrusions” to something less than appendages. There was a time in college when a few affectionately called me Mr. Potato-head—but they were just jealous, of course.

Whether flaws in the glass or flaws in the heart, the figurative mirror (the reflection) can be “harder to hold” (or accept) and even harder to change. The Believer is notably more prone to hold the mirror and to seek the change because of the fear that “anything less, would be uncivilized.” To wane from this “course for the cross” is more than the boat without a paddle—but is more like a boat adrift without any direction or purpose. And what better to cast a Christian from his moorings than a crisis that

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leaves him wondering who he is—or even who he was....

In his book, *Embracing Brokenness*, Alan Nelson describes several possible causes that steer us to *look into the mirror* and embrace *the reflection* (or what he calls “brokenness”). One of the four causes (of brokenness) is circumstances that threaten to defeat us. As he explains, a crisis can *soften the heart* for growth in Christ Jesus. Pride may come in a moment of glory (or a win), but a crisis can ultimately lead to the *final glory* (or victory) through the ever increasing realization of who God is—and what God has done (and is doing) to make us more than “who we were....”

The circumstances that “threaten to defeat us” are very real and very powerful; and for the Believer, these circumstances are sourced in the spiritual realm. But somewhere in the process of *going adrift*, I failed to see or recognize the source and perhaps the true cause behind the circumstances of divorce. I was immersed in the shame, guilt, remorse, grief, anger and all other emotions and reactions that can possibly occur in or during a crisis. My moorings had been loosed and my life set adrift—searching for the moment of glory rather than *final glory*.

One problem with a pursuit of “the moment” is that it only last a moment; then, the process or pursuit begins again...and again! One apparent victory or score is never enough to last but, as pride would have it, leads us back to another crisis or fall. This pursuit may pass by the figurative mirror more than once but, with no more than a glance of the flaws, we may continue-on in the mistake that God does not care (or is long gone) and—in the misery—we are beyond grace.

Grace (or Christ) is the cornerstone of the Christian faith; and the mercy of God is the source of this grace—this gift called salvation. Mercy does not exempt the Believer from “the crisis”

or possibly the other causes for brokenness, but it does offer us the presence of God and the joy that endures to the *final victory*. Mercy does not remove the Believer from the emotions and reactions of the crisis or trouble, but it does offer truth and honesty as well as the desire to look intently into the mirror first and continuing.... Mercy does not altogether remove the flaws of the heart, but it does cover them with righteousness. Mercy chastens those who are adrift as a beacon or lighthouse draws the seafaring to the shore. And still, mercy is so much more....

Mercy is only one side of God; the Word makes clear that God is also mighty. A contemporary song rings out the refrain that “God is mighty to save”. And with the gift of salvation, God is mighty to save indeed. This second side of God—as mighty—goes beyond salvation for the Believer. To be mighty means that God cares and that God is sovereign over the crisis, the trouble, or all other consequences or circumstances that can bring us to brokenness—and to greater understanding of...and surrender to God. God is mighty too!

I do not have the answers or reasons for the divorce and its aftermath; I do not know why God has allowed my circumstances—but I am left only with the conditions to understand and surrender still. If I could condense my thoughts into one sentence about the family, civil or criminal courts of *this land*, it is: the merciful and mighty God far outweighs them all. I have witnessed the so-called justice system and, consequently, am left with the longing for and belief in justice yet to come. God is mighty, but God offers mercy too.

Though the *lens of God* is always available, it is our choice. I have very bad vision (as yet another physical flaw) but, in the modern age, benefit from contact lens or glasses. Corrective lens have been the difference between a productive life and, quite

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possibly, a very short life. Needless to say, I do not have to be told or forced to wear lens; I can see clearly with lens and see little without them. The decision to use my lens might very well be the difference between life and death; but for the moment, the lens allows me to type these words.

The figurative mirror or reflection can be distorted by flaws in the glass too—to simply mean that what you see is not a true or accurate image. I have never been *in a house of mirrors*, but I have seen some examples in a movie or two. Besides the flaws or irregular glass, *the house* may be further confusing by lights and the reflections of one mirror to another.

One mirror to another was an arrangement of the first house (or condominium) that we lived in; the upstairs bathroom had opposing mirrors (or a vanity on opposing sides). Standing at one vanity, the image reflected off of the mirror to the rear and, to infinity, created an illusion of a vanishing image. Maybe this bathroom was the only direct experience that I had of anything like *a house of mirrors*. She liked the opposing mirrors because it allowed her to check her hair *in the round*.

To draw another association of mirrors, I turn again to *Why Good People Do Bad Things* by Erwin Lutzer; in the chapter "Lost in a House of Mirrors", he writes:

If a home is abusive or if the parents are addicted to alcohol or drugs, a child will grow-up in an environment with a code of silence: there is an unwritten rule that one does not talk about the family problems. Conflicts are left unresolved and all the emotions put on "autopilot". (4)

This excerpt was particularly stunning to me because, as I have written, my wife's family did not talk about their father. What I learned of Jesse (the natural father) I learned from the oldest

brother-in-law—and even what little I learned was shared in a one-on-one...and not in front of “the family”. Dr. Lutzer continues:

Regrettably, many parents are unable to equip their children to live as whole adults. When I speak of a “whole adult”, I mean someone who is able to give and receive love, someone who is capable of relating to others in meaningful ways. Many adult children of divorce and abuse cannot show love; for in doing so, they would have to reveal a part of themselves they would prefer to keep hidden. (4)

I’m not sure if Dr. Lutzer’s words (as that above) was the influence to my previous comments, but what is compelling is the similarity between the description and what I observed and came to realize: that love is often sacrificed to keep the past—or a part of themselves—hidden. But the sacrifice of love is not without anger too; for in the demands of each role is the requirement to “manage parental expectations”, as Erwin concludes:

Children often mask their anger and hurt to manage parental expectations, and this mask hardens into a shell. They must stay behind the mask to hide their feelings, knowing that their parents cannot handle the full impact of their anger and hurt. Their playacting is a form of dishonesty that becomes the price of acceptance. But as long as the shell is maintained, they never learn how to show love or receive it. When confronted with God’s grace and love, they want to turn away. If their parents didn’t love them, they reason, why would God? (4)

Is it possible that what Erwin describes has some direct association to what I have learned and have shared in the dynamic of her family and her? Is it possible for an engineer to

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read a couple of books and accurately draw a parallel or association between selected content and the family I once was a part of? I do not know—to both questions.

I say again that her anger began long before we met; and her behavior was developed long before our marriage. Consequently, the better question or concern may have something to do with the real source of her anger—as it continues—and her belief that she is fully justified in her behavior.

Anger directed at an ex-spouse is not unusual. From the book *Second Chances*: “Incredibly one-half of the women and one-third of the men are still intensely angry at their former spouses, despite the passage of ten years.”(67) But the term or length of her anger long-preceded the divorce and, as I have intentionally tried to suggest, was long-present when we met. Yes, such a statement or view is not without its risks and possible errors; but I do not apologize for the length and depth at which I have tried to understand her behavior—from our courtship to the present.

One problem with those opposing mirrors was that the image continues to a vanishing point and, though fascinating at first, can do more than to imagine your body in miniature. Like “the shrinking man” of some long-ago sci-fi movie, your body is reflected to the point of insignificance. This view is only an illusion but, in the right context, it has some association to earlier content; for when you look “intently into the mirror”, this illusion is not so evident. When you look only at the immediate reflection and not the opposing, then you presumably see the *real image*.

The *real image* is what we need to see—though it may not be what we want to see. I might have preferred to see an image with smaller, sweptback ears, but what I see is the ears that I *got* from

my paternal grandfather. Of course, I should be thankful that I can see at all!

If I am unwilling or afraid (as an adult) to remember who I was (as a child), then I have no real image of who I am. But if I am unwilling as a Believer to look intently into the figurative mirror to see the *real image* of who I am (or have become...), then I have no real sense of God, his mercy and might. Yes, a *real* reflection or image can reveal the hurt (or wounds) while confirming our desire to know, to be honest...to know and live the truth. Again, his mercy and his might.

“Ire-reflections Irritating” is looking intently and repeatedly into that figurative mirror to find the image of Christ in our lives. The desire to be honest and to know truth is not so that God can condemn us, but so that we can accept his grace, his mercy. Still, the life is not without trouble or crisis among other causes that produce brokenness—and then, surrender...again.



Juggernaut Juggling

As a parent is drawn to his children, or vice versa, so the Juggernaut was juggled in trying to maintain meaningful relationships.

I can recall a few jugglers in my lifetime. Visiting the circus when I was very young, attending a medieval festival when I was much older, and watching a few friends or colleagues *try their hand at it*. The juggling of my parenting began with the first child and has continued in some form *to this day*. I think some form of juggling—no matter how many figurative balls—will continue to the day I leave this earth.

I never had an interest in learning to juggle. Again, I had some social interaction with a few people that did, and they seemed to take great satisfaction in mastering three balls. Among the professional ranks, The Zucchini Brothers could juggle fire, balls, fruit and quite possibly anvils—but I never saw them actually juggle the anvils. What I did see was some incredible stuff; a half-hour of dazzling feats for the amusement of my family among the other *commoners* of the medieval festival. This particular day of stepping back to the *days of yore* was a rare occasion (at the time), but it may serve as yet another analogy or fable for *A Once and Always Father*.

For in the *dark time* of no-fault divorce, the *king's men* had taken many of the children from their rightful homes; the *wicked*

court had wielded its power through a decree or by way of a force, a juggernaut. And the children would learn the nature of a juggernaut as fully able to tear-away at the moorings of a man's life by dismembering his own family for reason save *the law of the land*. It was *dark time*, and though well into my adulthood, taught me a lesson or two about the *mystic forces* working behind the robes and gilded walls of our kingdom's most honorable courts.

Yet there remains in these *dark days* a glimmer of hope. For the natural and Godly desire of parents and their children is conceivably a strong force too. Even the basic, natural instinct of the parent-child bond has been portrayed in some truly incredible and sacrificial ways; and with such a history and enduring fortitude, can this bond be denied by even the juggernaut of today's family law?

Returning to a much respected source, *Life without Father*, Kingsley Davis is quoted in the subtitle, "What happened to Marriage?"

The genius of [marriage] is that, through it, the society normally holds the biological parents responsible for each other and for their offspring. By identifying children with their parents, and by penalizing people who do not have stable relationships, the social system powerfully motivates individuals to settle into a sexual union and take care of the ensuring offspring. (37)

And marriage long-existed before the *courts of our land*; it was long an institution designed to strengthen the bonds of parents and children through a union that transcended that of any broad-based or national government. Yet, such a bond and institution has come under increasing pressure—even

Juggernaut Juggling

destruction—as described in previous chapters. And at the center of this decline, the dad has gradually disappeared....

From the publication *Father Facts* of the National Fatherhood Initiative (fatherhood.org), the following quote from Vice President Al Gore:

Don't ever doubt the impact that fathers have on children. Children with strongly committed fathers learn about trust early on. They learn about trust with their hearts. They learn they're wanted; that they have value, that they can afford to be secure and confident and set their sights high. They get the encouragement they need to keep going through the rough spots in life. (154)

Not that the above virtues of fathers need be mentioned further, but it seems necessary in view of the *dichotomy* or deficit in the courts. The active role of the courts toward the dismantling of families cannot be overlooked; indeed, some sources make the proposal (or charge) that it is purposeful—or with full intent as an assault (or siege) on the American family. The state of marriage and family is more than the mere casual and convenient change from convention, but it is a complex and calculated movement made so by family law and the *courts of our land*.

*Not that the
above virtues of
fathers need be
....*

The treatment of the role and responsibility of the fathers is most poignant in the television and film media. Criticism is rampant—exceptions to this treatment are rare. Comical though they are, the characterizations within these animated and actual episodes are pathetic too—but I guess they're supposed to be? Not mentioning the actual characters or programs does not obviously add credibility to my claims (or the claims of others

whom I've read); but I believe the condition has long-existed and, sadly, has become the greater norm rather than exception. Are these characterizations representative of the mass of men who call themselves fathers? I don't think so. David Popenoe writes in his book *Fatherless America* that "men...and fathers...are increasingly viewed as superfluous to family life." He continues:

Men, in general, and fathers in particular, are increasingly viewed as superfluous to family life: either expendable or as part of the problem. Masculinity itself...is typically treated with suspicion and even hostility in our cultural discourse.
(48-50)

The "condition" described above may lead to the immediate *chicken and egg*—with debate on whether the derelict dad was the cause or the effect of this "societal condition". But whether cause or effect, the "condition" has created what some experts refer to as "the greatest social crisis of our day."

To give some credence (or at least question) to the possible "effect" of this social crisis, consider the following content from "Divorced from Reality" by Dr. Stephen Baskerville.

The decline of the family has now reached critical and truly dangerous proportions. Family breakdown touches virtually every family and every American. It is not only the major source of social instability in the Western world today but also seriously threatens civic freedom and constitutional government.

So while the cause and effect may remain somewhat undetermined (at least by me), the consequences have been devastating to our society, our culture.

Juggernaut Juggling

Continuing in “Divorced from Reality” with some words from the English writer, G. K. Chesterton, Baskerville writes:

G. K. Chesterton once observed that the family serves as the principal check on government power, and he suggested that someday the family and *The State* would confront one another. That day has arrived. Chesterton was writing about divorce; and despite extensive public attention to almost every other threat to the family, divorce remains the most direct and serious.

Dr. Baskerville adds:

Michael McManus of Marriage Savers writes that “divorce is a far more grievous blow to marriage than today’s challenge by gays.”

Why more public attention is not on divorce—or is seemingly focused elsewhere—is obviously a question (and concern) that warrants more attention on my part. After all, divorce and the loss of my children is “the crisis” in my life—at least thus far!

In my own limited discussion of the topic and its relations, I have come to realize that most people—and particularly those who have not experienced divorce—are not aware of (or concerned about) the magnitude of the crisis.

*...most
people...are not
aware of the
magnitude of
the crisis....*

But then, they are not aware that a person can lose his children through no-fault divorce...having done nothing legally wrong or potentially wrong through marriage and family relations. Continuing in “Divorced from Reality”, Baskerville adds:

Most Americans would be deeply shocked if they knew what goes on today under the name of divorce. Indeed, many are devastated to discover that they can be forced into divorce by procedures entirely beyond their control.

Regarding the “nature of the juggernaut”, Stephen Baskerville continues:

Divorce licenses unprecedented government intrusion into family life, including the power to sunder families, seize children, loot family wealth, and incarcerate parents without trial.

And as to the *courts of the land*, he adds:

Comprised of family courts and vast, federally funded social services bureaucracies that wield what amount to police powers, the divorce machinery has become the most predatory and repressive sector of government ever created in the United States and is today’s greatest threat to constitutional freedom.

Okay, what do you think now? Within this social crisis is an enormous— even perhaps inestimable—cost that far outweighs the monies levied in attorney’s fees, court costs, and other profit centers of *the divorce industry*.

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In April of 2008, MSNBC published an article, “Study: Divorce, unwed parenting costs billions”. From the article, the following:

Divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing cost U.S. taxpayers more than \$112 billion a year, according to a study commissioned by four groups advocating more government action to bolster marriages.

...There have been previous attempts to calculate the cost of divorce in America. But the sponsors of the new study, being released Tuesday, said theirs is the first to gauge the broader cost of "family fragmentation"—both divorce and unwed childbearing.

But the cost borne by the public is not just about unwed childbearing or the lower classes of society. Divorce has long made its way to the middle class too; Stephen Baskerville explains:

Over the years, child support has increasingly functioned less as a way to reduce or recover welfare costs and more as a forced subsidy on middle-class divorce. States are paid by federal taxpayers based on the amount they collect. This encourages them to neglect welfare families, for whom the program was designed, because there is little money to be had.

Wait a minute! Is he saying that states are subsidized by federal taxpayers to enforce child support collections?

Is he saying that states have turned divorce into an opportunity for increased taxation and support of state revenues? I think that is what he is saying....as he continues:

Instead, enforcement agencies have shifted their focus to middle-class families, for whom the program was never intended, because they can collect large sums and, with them, lucrative federal funds, which can then be spent for any purpose. Using child support, state governments found they could raise revenue through the growth of single-parent homes.

Surely the states—or more broadly a *free society*—would not exploit the weaknesses or vulnerabilities of families by encouraging and enabling divorce for gain. Well, I cannot say for sure, but it seems plausible (that is, taxation through exploitation) considering *The System* so described in this article and in other sources of similar topic and subject.

A juggernaut is a powerful, irresistible force. This juggernaut seems to be largely unstoppable...as though the “storm of the century” or some similar climatic event or natural occurrence. For this *second to none* loss of my life and, more generally, the “greatest social crisis of our day”, the “encouraging and enabling” of divorce has been very real and vivid. As to the beginning of this indomitable force, Dr. Baskerville briefly explains in “The Failure of ‘Family Policy’” about where it all began.

Beginning in the 1970’s, America quietly embarked on the boldest social experiment in her history. With no public discussion of the possible consequences, laws were enacted in virtually every jurisdiction that ended marriage as a legal contract and precluded couples from creating binding agreements to rear children.

Juggernaut Juggling

And as to the conditions to set the force afoot, he continues:

Regardless of the terms on which a marriage is entered, government officials can now, at the request of one spouse, simply dissolve it over the objection of the other and with no penalty to the moving party. As far as the federal and state governments are concerned, all couples are cohabiting.

And what has been the consequence of this *path of destruction*? Stephen explains, again in brief from the same source:

The divorce revolution weakened marriage and fatherhood among members of the middle class in striking parallel to what welfare inflicted on the poor. In addition, the surge in divorce has expanded the welfare state itself to include the middle class, turning programs conceived to address the problems of low-income, single-parent homes into financial incentives for middle-class divorce.

With such a force in *full swing*, where lies the hope for healing—or the possibility for any parental reconciliation of families torn asunder? This single question has been on my mind for many years and, even now, remains a fixation...because of an opposing force called love. Yes, love is a powerful force too.

Granted that I have had plenty of possibilities to lose hope—given the developing knowledge of the magnitude and might of this juggernaut. I have obviously read much on the matter and have posted much to my Website and elsewhere. Further, I have joined the ranks of the American Coalition of Fathers and Children (ACFC) and the National Fatherhood Initiative (fathers.org) in engaging public policy and the general blight that has marked this national (and

Yes, love is a powerful force too.

international) crisis. Yes, I have not always sat passively by or obliged this *law of the land* that has become a scourge; but I have come-about with *oar in the water* and *face to the wind*—a tempest though it be.

The subscribed organizations and other materials have been instrumental in helping me juggle the juggernaut—of understanding *The Madness* behind *The Mess*; of realizing the *special interests* that gave birth to the deceptively-ennobled rights to divorce, and *The System* that has encouraged and enabled divorce—and its debt to society. Oh yes, I have seen what Milton Friedman describes as the “unholy war” of social causes where, behind the “do-gooders”, are the special interests (*the divorce industry*, bar associations, feminism, etc.) with ulterior motives.

As with the saying, “the more you learn, the less you know”, my pursuit of knowledge and involvement has been mixed with the sheer might of the force—or “the more you learn, the less hope you have.” Clearly, the force that has so radically-reduced marriage from a covenant to a convenience deserves respect—if for no other reason than that they have been able to “play upon the natural sympathy for women and children”. From “The Failure of ‘Family Policy’”, Dr. Baskerville writes:

These programs are virtually unassailable, not only because they balance state budgets, but because they play upon our natural sympathy for women and children. Anyone questioning child support incurs feminist charges of defending “deadbeat dads.”

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Dr. Baskerville continues:

Further, by appealing to superficially conservative values, feminists have gained allies among centrist Democrats as well as the neoconservatives who dominate Republican family policy. Even family-values conservatives are reluctant to challenge policies they know to be driving single motherhood and criminalizing fatherhood.

The war rages on—as does the deep-seeded anger behind it! But to counter this magnanimous might of so-called social reform, what can the much-maligned father do? How can anyone fight or face such policies or systems—composed of both “do-gooders” and *special interests*...backed by the vested interest of *The State*? Well, they surely cannot count on politics...or society at large.

Time may be an ally because, as our nation continues with unprecedented spending, the programs that have underwritten child enforcement—and its consequences—may falter. My statement might seem cruel to the general reader (because children of divorce need financial help or assistance); but the tenor of the statement is not insensitivity to children’s needs, but rather, concerns regarding the consequences that a taxed-based child enforcement system has rendered. If this system of child enforcement has encouraged and enabled divorce—perpetuating the problem—then it needs to see its end. Derailment of the *money train* may not happen real soon however, and so *the beat goes on* with policies in opposition to fathers, families and our faith.

Time may be an ally in another way for, as the circumstances unfold or become more adverse, perhaps politics and society at large will become more aware and active on behalf of the millions of children whose best interests have been neglected.

A Once and Always Father

What a non-custodial parent must realize is that he *does matter* (to his children); and that he *does matter* to society. One of the consequences of divorce can be to devalue this parent—to make him believe that he is no more valuable than the sum of child support or his tax liability to *The State*. I have struggled with my own worth: not having seen my children in eight years—though trying to do so—has left me with those feelings or a sense of worthlessness. But what I must remind myself is that my children have struggled too; that they may have a “sense of worthlessness” at times. Young folks of all kinds may struggle with their esteem from time to time, but the possibility is greater for those separated from a parent and paternal family.

In *Fatherless America*, David Poponoe offers his observations: Fatherless (America) contributes to a decline of character and competence in children. Today, a growing character (-based) deficit is widely evident in our society, affecting countless aspects of children’s behavior and mental health...Children doing without a father’s money is the easy part. Money influences what you have and what you can do. (37)

The non-custodial can still make a positive contribution toward his children, their character. He can show them love in the midst of his losses and his longing to be so much more. The American Coalition for Fathers and Children (ACFC) offers some encouraging words for the post-divorce parent. From *A Shared Parenting Tool-Kit*:

We can make positive improvements in our relationships no matter what the past history has been. Divorce often brings a whole new set of problems...and challenges...and how one views the challenges is what gives the feelings of being peaceful, powerful or useful...we can work things out. (9)

Juggernaut Juggling

So, the non-custodial is *not over* as a parent—as a positive influence in his children’s lives. Sure, he must do some portion of “Juggernaut Juggling”, but he has the greatest force that any parent can have; he has love.



Scales Scaling

“In the case of divorce, when one parent is financially or emotionally devastated, the children lose as well because one of the most important people in their lives has been harmed”.

-Defusing the High-Conflict Divorce; Dysfunctions of the Court System: Judges and Attorneys.

Scaling a wall is more a challenge than I know. Scaling the *scales of justice*—as with juggling the juggernaut—is more than I would like to know. The non-custodial must scale these *scales*—and he must do so while trying to maintain some semblance of parenting, if that is possible.

Besides the degradation and dismissal of his role as parent, the non-custodial is faced with any number of financial obligations—with the full measure of the law should he fail in one or more.... Further, he is regulated by the state as to contact with his own children—a condition that is Draconian in measure for both the parent and his family. Authority, which is essential to be an effective parent, has been stripped-away by the state and, to his disadvantage, shifted to the remaining parent for their bidding. Should he want or desire to deviate from the visitation plan, he must collaborate with the remaining parent; and should his visitation be compromised, he must go back to court and plead his so-called right. In short, the non-custodial is no parent at all; but he has lost this rightful role quite possibly for no

legitimate or justified reason. From Dr. Stephen Baskerville's "Divorced from Reality":

Almost invariably, the involuntarily divorced spouse will want and expect to continue enjoying the protections and prerogatives of private life: the right to live in the common home, to possess the common property, or—most vexing of all—to parent the common children. These claims must be terminated, using the penal system if necessary.

He continues on what I refer to as the "Draconian" nature of the courts:

... Divorce by its nature requires constant government supervision over family life. Far more than marriage, divorce mobilizes and expands government power.

The non-custodial must begin his climb or ascent out of the ashes of a real family. He thinks he has survived the onslaught of the juggernaut but is only beginning to realize the full extent of the damage...and that life will never be the same. His dreams and goals have been *bottomed-out* by courts capable of condemning him as a *real* parent and incriminating him for nothing more than an attempt to resume a healthy role in his children's lives. He is effectively guilty by way of the losses and his newly acquired title. He is charged and convicted for attempting to fulfill his paternal role—for promises made in the plan of parenthood. Again from Dr. Stephen Baskerville in "Divorced from Reality":

Unilateral divorce inescapably involves government agents forcibly removing legally innocent people from their homes, seizing their property, and separating them from their children. It inherently abrogates not only the inviolability of marriage but the very concept of private life.

Scales Scaling

And as to his effort to protect his own children; well, they become wards of the state as Stephen describes:

By far the most serious consequences involve children, who have become the principal weapons of the divorce machinery. Invariably the first action of a divorce court, once a divorce is filed, is to separate the children from one of their parents, usually the father. Until this happens, no one in the *machinery* acquires any power or earnings. The first principle and first action of divorce court therefore: Remove the father.

And in turn, the state begins its *dirty work* of condemning—and even criminalizing—the “unwilling” in the divorce case. Again, Stephen writes:

This happens even if the father is innocent of any legal wrongdoing.... The state seizes control of his children with no burden of proof to justify why. The burden of proof (and the financial burden) falls on the father to demonstrate why they should be returned.

How then is a man to react to such examples of injustice? How would you act or respond to this kind of treatment—this preemptive action of dismantling the parent because of the want for divorce?

Nature offers a very redeemable quality in parents and adults of many species. The adult is inherently predisposed to protect his young...with even his life, if necessary. The level of at which a parent will go *to get back* to his family is measured by his depth or source of love—and the threats and obstacles that oppose him. A natural response to such threats is engineered into a parent or adult whether of the human variety or some animal species.

The juggernaut, as described in the last chapter, is one such threat on the parent of contemporary America. Referred to as no-fault, unilateral, or uncontested divorce, the juggernaut can render the defendant virtually defenseless in any effort to contest the *complaint of divorce*. The state has perhaps already determined that the marriage is irreconcilable or irreparable in conjunction with the plaintiff's position.

What is clearly the case from the very start is that the term “no-fault” is a misnomer—as someone is definitely “at fault” for the impending divorce! Yet, the juggernaut is unstoppable from the stand-point that a mutually-agreed upon relationship can be dissolved out of nothing more than one's want, one's appeasement. Drawing from the resources of Dr. Stephen Baskerville, the following from “Divorced from Reality”:

Some four decades ago...the Western world embarked on the boldest social experiment in its history...Today it is not possible to form a binding agreement to create a family. The government can now, at the request of one spouse, simply dissolve a marriage over the objection of the other.

The courts have long-established a precedent of rewarding the woman custody of the children. In this precedent, the courts can essentially encourage and enable divorce by rewarding those who dissolve the marriage and dismember the family. Yes, the juggernaut can leave a wake of destruction, degradation and despair.

...the courts can essentially encourage and enable divorce...

The scales (of justice) are seemingly *fixed from the start* or, as in industry terms, are in desperate need of re-calibration. As to *Lady Justice*—the *blindfold* (if any) is one-

Scales Scaling

sided—giving full attention (and admission) of the impending divorce while remaining *blind* to the true victims, the children. The juggernaut is nothing in the way of impartial when it comes to “the boldest social experiment” in *our land’s* history.

With some association to the *plea bargain*—or the preempting of *due-process*—no-fault divorce can criminalize a parent for attempting to be a parent. The juggernaut has returned the penal system to the *days of yore* through debtor’s prison—a state response to child’s support arrears that does nothing to benefit the children or to better society.

Again, I am not versed or educated in law, but I do have firsthand experience in juggling the juggernaut. I am a non-custodial that has been:

- Pressed into a divorce against my desires and the desires of my children
- Removed from my home as a preemptive step toward divorce
- Stripped of my parenthood, my income, and my property
- Accused of spousal abuse, child abuse, abandonment in series
- Perjured in court—libel and slander in testimony and injunctions
- Criminalized due to the injunction or restraining orders
- Ordered to engage in numerous mental evaluations—the outcome of which have been ignored or negated by those purposed to legitimize their claims, their pretense
- Witnessed to further implication of my children in *The Mess*
- Threatened of further implication of my children (as court attendants/ witnesses) so as to accept a plea bargain
- Misled by the courts as to the nature of my plea bargain
- Damaged in terms of my career as an engineer in the aerospace and defense industry
- Engaged in the *Catch-22* of child support
- Alienated from my children in perpetuity...based on a lie

Oh yes, I know what it's like to be a non-custodial who has endured such "destruction, degradation and despair"! I have witnessed much of Stephen Baskerville's "Divorced from Reality" on a firsthand basis in my ascent of scaling the wall—in dealing with *Lady Justice* with her inaccurate scales, her one-sided blindfold and her shameless sword.

The content of my writings and this book have made clear that I did not want the divorce—that *plain reason* could not justify a divorce in my marriage. Yet, the courts stand (or stood) on the side of those who prefer to terminate marriage for the expressed reason that "he does not make me happy." In this position of promoting divorce, the courts have been complicit in the unjustified and unabashed desires of one—without consideration to their conduct in court and the veracity of their testimony. The protection of the innocent and punishment of the guilty has given way to expedience, partiality, and corruption.

The removal from my household occurred through the telephone contact from her attorney in September (a week or two before the divorce trial). Sure, I could have *stood my ground*; but the children had been taken to an undisclosed location for an indefinite period—according to the attorney. As a parent, what would you do...in the best interest of your children? In the single act, her attorney followed suit with "The first principle and first action of divorce court therefore: Remove the father." This act alone was yet another example of how our children have been leveraged in the sordid schemes of divorce and its consequences—giving full view of the veil hiding the true intentions of the supposed loving parent and her council. Implicating children is *beneath contempt*, but has been practiced more than once under the auspices that *the end justifies the means*.

Scales Scaling

From “Defusing the High-Conflict Divorce”, the authors warn:

As long as the co-parents use their children as innocent pawns in their battle, children feel the emotional tug of war between being faithful, helpful, children and being used by their parents to keep the fires of battle burning. Children come to resent being pawns and react with withdrawal, passive defiance, or outright hostility to their parents. (50)

And you may wonder, “Why would a father voluntarily leave his own property...to allow his children to return?” Because of that powerful force called love.

*Suppose the
state comes to
your home...*

To describe the condition of being “stripped of your parenthood...”, consider the following personalized example for which any property owner would *take issue*. Suppose that the state comes to your home unannounced and informs you that your property is being seized. Without much detail and no legitimate basis, the state’s representative indicates you must vacate, transfer the deed, and find other living arrangements at your expense. But wait, there’s more: though your property is being taken from you, you will still be responsible for paying for it—both the mortgage and taxes! Yes, you will remain liable and indebted for the property you no longer own.

Albeit that your accounts are in *good standing*, your effort to question this action is moot; the state has imposed its authority....and any resistance will render you a criminal. For good public relations, the state grants a few days each month to visit the property you once owned—but again, it is not your property any more.

I must emphasize that the association of “property” to persons is not my belief; rather it is the way in which the courts treat children. Reminiscent of the days of slavery in America, the courts have reduced our children to property—to be stamped with a de facto price and be awarded as a prize by default.

False accusations of child or spousal abuse are also *standard fare* for *the lot* of this so-called justice system. My experience alone has much to offer in the collection of *devices* of the sordid schemes of divorce. Before bringing these personal experiences to bear, I turn again to Dr. Stephen Baskerville in “Divorced from Reality”:

The growth of the divorce machinery during the 1970s and 1980s did not follow but preceded (in other words, it generated) a series of hysterias against parents—especially fathers—so hideous and inflammatory that no one, left or right, dared question them or defend those accused: child abuse and molestation, wife-beating, and nonpayment of “child support.” Each of these hysterias has been propagated largely by feminists, bar associations, and social work bureaucracies, whose federal funding is generously shared with state and local law-enforcement officials.

In these “hysterias” is quite possibly the “do-gooders” of social reform (referring to statement and terms by Milton Friedman); but *in the mix* of such programs is the *special interests* too. Hysteria (or a crisis) is the perfect forum to incubate public support for populist action. Amid those who want or intend to do good is also the special interests with other agenda. In this “unholy alliance” is the creation of a crisis and, in turn, opportunity for *the nanny state*.

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Continuing in “Divorced from Reality”, Stephen describes these “hysterias” as analogous to the witch-hunts of the 1700’s.

What is ironic about these witch-hunts is the fact that it is easily demonstrable that the child abuse epidemic—which is very real—is almost entirely the creation of feminism and the welfare bureaucracies themselves.

What about *due-process*? He continues:

Yet patently false accusations of both child abuse and domestic violence are rampant in divorce courts, almost always for purposes of breaking up families, securing child custody, and eliminating fathers. “With child abuse and spouse abuse you don’t have to prove anything,” the leader of a legal seminar tells divorcing mothers, according to the Chicago Tribune. “You just have to accuse.”

The testimony of “the victim” has been the single-source of evidence in my experience. Other sources of evidence have been devalued or disregarded—even evidence ordered by the prosecution, no less. Outlandish or unsubstantiated testimony has never been questioned (let alone punished), in terms of motive or intent, but is tolerated—contributing to the “encouraging and enabling” of divorce and the aftermath.

The circumstances of such maltreatment of evidence should not be surprising (in view of what has been presented); but for the designated perpetrator or defendant, the consequences are devastating as Dr. Baskerville explains:

The parent on the receiving end of such accusations—even in the absence of any formal charge, evidence, or conviction—not only loses his children summarily and often permanently; he also finds himself abandoned by friends and family members, parishioners and pastors, co-workers and employers (and he may well lose his job)—all terrified to be associated with an accused “pedophile,” “batterer,” or “deadbeat dad.”

I guess it could be worse. The accused could be burned at the stake, dunked repeatedly as an early form of *water-boarding*, or something worse—like the enforced neglect of his children!

The chapter, “Gondola Grand”, offers much on the debt or financial burdens of the non-custodial. Inundated and imputed with child support and other obligations, the non-custodial has every reason to believe his *persona* as *non grata* with the possible, though temporary, exception of his children. His child support (as a supplemental contribution to the tax base) and other financial obligations represent his single purpose from the viewpoint of the state; otherwise, he is deemed expendable at best and worthless, even contemptible, at the mere words of the other parent.

Scales Scaling

What's worse is that his child support obligation actually perpetuates the problem (the devaluation and dilution of marriage...incentive for divorce) as Stephen explains in "Divorced from Reality":

*What's worse is
that child
support
actually...*

Like the welfare it was supposed to replace, child support finances family dissolution by paying mothers to divorce....Kimberly

Folse and Hugo Varela-Alvarez write in the Journal of Socio-Economics that child support serves as an "economic incentive for middle-class women to seek divorce."

But "Mothers are not the only ones who can profit by creating fatherless children." Stephen continues:

State governments receive federal funds for every child-support dollar collected—money they can add to their general funds and use for any purpose they choose. This gives states a financial incentive to create as many single-parent households as possible by encouraging middle-class divorce. While very little child support—or government revenue—is generated from the impecunious young unmarried fathers for whom the program was ostensibly created, involuntarily divorced middle-class fathers have deeper pockets to loot.

To say again, divorce has moved upward to the middle classes and, in doing so, has leveraged the lives of yet more children on an altar of greed, power and its *special interests*.

Roughly three years after my divorce, my ex-wife filed for a modification to child support. The state raised my obligation by over fifty percent and, in addition, assumed their role as the

intermediate. Prior child support was paid directly to my ex-wife; and though I was alienated from my children, I had maintained my obligation without arrears. Since that time, my payment performance has not been so stellar; to my regret, my one purpose in regard to my children (as far as the state is concerned) has been thwarted by irregular and contracted employment—and a general malaise that men may experience when their roles as parents are perverted into one of contempt, even criminal.

Restraining orders and an injunction are at the root of the general malaise. When *the victim* is given a *license to lie* and the *latitude to create law*, they can enact the restraining order with a single, unchallenged statement. Referring to this process under such titles and phrases as “The Ruse” and “abusing *The System* aimed to protect the abused”, I have been the culprit of such “egregious” acts of:

- Attending my children’s ball game to see them play in the marching band
- Sending letters to my children of which the content is loving, healthy and otherwise normal parental dialogue
- Sending monies and gifts for special occasions such as birthdays and Christmas
- Sending my oldest a graduation gift along with an offer to assist him with his post-graduate plans
- Sending monies for school lunch programs, band trips and other school-related activities

Such conduct or behavior—that falls well within the norm of parental care—has been perverted through the collaboration of an angry parent and a complicit court. Once referred to as “politically motivated” by a public defender, the treatment of such benign behavior is perverted to maliciousness and abuse.

Scales Scaling

Why can millions of parent do what I did and not worry—or even consider—their actions to be prosecutable? Because they do have someone (namely, a former spouse) who is able or willing to misuse a system; they do not have someone whose chief objective is to ensure the destruction of the paternal relationship with their children. The difference between being a parent and being prosecuted can be reduced to the restraining order; and the restraining order or injunction can be issued merely on a statement—irrespective of its accuracy or veracity. The juggernaut is able to grow in strength on the liberties that go beyond lying and law making; indeed, *the victim* is also *above the law*—as they can violate the restraining in principal to implicate “the perpetrator”. I call this last of these privileges “the bait and switch”—or where “the perpetrator” has been lured into a crime by *the victim*.

In the fall 2008 issue of *The Liberator*, an article by Mike McCormick and Glenn Sacks offers further insight into restraining orders in the context of divorce and family law. From their article, “Restraining orders: restraining justice?”, they begin, “A large body of evidence shows that restraining orders are frequently misused. “ They cite some of the evidence from The California Bar Association’s family law section, the official publication Family Law News:

Protective orders are increasingly being used in family law cases to help one side jockey for an advantage in child custody... (They are) almost routinely issued by the court in family law proceedings even when there is relatively meager evidence and usually without notice to the restrained person...it is troubling that they appear to be sought more and more frequently for retaliation and litigation purposes.

Citing another source from the Newark (New Jersey) family law, attorney Bruce Pitman says, “Anybody who practices law sees people who abuse the restraining order process.” He continues:

Some create false allegations or take minor or insignificant acts and use them to remove their spouse or partner from the home for advantage in litigation. Such abuses undermine victims of real abuse and violence who seek protection.

Is it possible that a system aimed at helping the abused, could be abused? Well, let us not forget the relevant words of Lord Acton: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” When the courts divert the mutual authority of parents, the “rewarded” parent is given new found liberties that not only offer absolute power over the children but a very real threat to the other parent as well. Who is *the victim*?

“Scales Scaling” might be compared in difficulty with climbing Mount Everest or some similar topography; a monumental challenge for the non-custodial against the juggernaut that has been relentless in the destruction of families, homes, children and their fathers. Love is the one ally of the parent who is willing to make great sacrifices—even violation of *The System* of justice—to offer even the slightest evidence that he has not forgotten his children...and never will.



Non-Custodial Navigating

The paradox of being a payee is that the monies provided as child support can be used to finance “the war” against you. You may be struggling to meet all your obligations but, standby, you could be restrained forever....

As *The System* of child support perpetuates divorce, the personal payments of a non-custodial can finance “the war”—or further breach the relationship between him and his children. In the arsenal of the juggernaut is the ignominious injunction (or restraining order)—the means to create “The Ruse” or to execute the “the bait and switch”. With such “weapons of family destruction” at the convenience of the one, what is the other (parent) to do? With such exploitations and abuses of *Lady Justice*, good intentions can be conveniently framed as malicious and criminal—so as to render a once caring and devoted parent as a rogue.

Navigating the waters of the non-custodial lifestyle can be very difficult and challenging. For some, the challenge becomes unbearable and, in desperation, they take their own lives. In America, the suicide rate among men is anywhere from seven to ten times higher than for women. I am sure that such extreme statistics could be analyzed (or have been) by the social scientists and other experts, but the comparative mortality rate of men

gives legitimacy to the *one-sided blindfold* of *Lady Justice* among other injustices.

I had the memorable experience of seeing the Ringling Brothers Circus when I was boy. I don't recall if the trapeze had a net underneath, but do remember that breathtaking event high above the rings of activity and entertainment. As amazing as the aerial gymnastics may be—even for one unfamiliar with the details or conditioning—the fact remains that it is dangerous and has apparent risks. Taking this term, “trapeze”, and blending with navigating or boating, the immediate thought is my first experience of sailing on a catamaran. Nothing like the circus, the trapeze (or trapezing) consisted of shackling one crew (or passenger) to a line or cable as a counter weight to bring the main sail vertical.

The connection between the two events (the circus and sailing) is merely to point-out that being a non-custodial requires some navigation to be sure. The balance of my reason for mentioning the events is simply on impulse and the remote possibility that my children may get the chance to read their father's writing—that is, when the children are free and willing to

navigate their own lives...beyond the juggernaut.

*I never
imagined that I
could go to jail
on the intention
of being a
parent...*

In the nine years of post-divorce life (or as of 2009), I have been incarcerated twice. The first time was December 2006, where I was charged with violating the injunction on evidence that I attended my children's ball game. The second time was May 2008 where I was

charged with violating probation (VOP) and charged with aggravated stalking on evidence of writing my children, sending

Non-Custodial Navigating

them monies, and offering a gift and assistance to my oldest who was graduating from high school.

I never imagined that I could go to jail on the intention of being a parent to my children. Perhaps as with marriage and parenting, I was naïve to understand the depth as which one might go—given the leniency of the law—to destroy another member of the family. Yes, I was somewhat educated on such “family feuds”, but never considered that a parent could be so easily incriminated by the courts. Observation and experience has enabled me to recognize the depth of destruction that can be carried-out without restraint, conscience, or apparent sense of wrongdoing.

The “experience” that I describe is not about the alcoholic and abusive father—whose activities or behavior has *gone to the grave*—but about the far less-likely abuse of the seemingly devoted and caring parent. Like no-fault divorce that is shrouded in sympathy, the parent I describe has mastered both the role of a victim and the dutiful caretaker. This “type” has learned that the perception—as well as possession—is the difference between winning and losing, victory and defeat. For the custodial parent, possession is not nine-tenths of the law—it is the law!

In September 2006, I took a contract position with an aerospace manufacturer in the same county where my children lived. Not by accident, but with a plan of some form, I accepted the position and moved with all good intention—but with much risk too. In the same year, my ex-wife had added some longevity to a series of temporary restraining orders through an injunction.

A Once and Always Father

A two page document, the injunction included the following; or what I call “the basis” or justification for the order:

Implicit in the Court’s Order Domesticating the Parties’ Final Judgment of Divorce for the State of Georgia which requires supervised visitation only upon the direction of a licensed psychologist is that the former husband shall have no contact with parties’ minor children.

When I received this injunction in February of that year, I knew that any opportunity to be reconciled with my children would be difficult, if not impossible. Further, I knew that the injunction was based on a lie: to begin, the divorce decree (state of Georgia) clearly stipulated unsupervised visitation with my children; second, the decree included no condition or requirement for any medical or psychological evaluation, but instead, was a conventional, non-custodial, and non-conditional visitation plan.

I was amazed that the courts would have authorized (or approved) this document without examining the accuracy and veracity of “the basis”; but again, I was naïve.... What observation and experience has afforded in the realization is that, as Johnny Cochrane stated at least once, “the color of justice is green.” By whatever means or through whatever process, my ex-wife was able to fabricate “the basis” to convince the law of the worthiness or sincerity of her concerns, her fears. She was given the *license to lie* and the *latitude to create law*; and she has been given the means to finance her schemes through my child support. With both financial capital and the judiciary concern, she has discharged such a pattern of destruction so as to compare with a juggernaut and the tempest of “the storm of the century”.

Non-Custodial Navigating

As I have said more than once, “I am the only person in the world who is legally prevented from having any contact with my children.” In a recent essay (of mine) on this subject, I continue:

Her latitude to create law has been the means by which a series of temporary orders were issued and, at last, an injunction that restrains in perpetuity.

Starting from a temporary restraining order issued in March 2000—coinciding with the complaint for divorce—she has been able to activate order after order using the kind of schemes so represented in “the basis”. Merely on her words—and without any regard or consideration for other evidence—the state issues (and enforces) such serial orders. The initial restraining order (March 2000) was violated too; not by me, but by *the victim* that, by her own volition, returned to our home in Georgia. She violated her own law—and did (or does) so with impunity!

Merely on her words...the state issues (and enforces) such serial orders.

The longitude (to be *above the law*) simply means that she can violate the injunction in principle. This one *device* is particularly effective in perverting well-intended parenting into malicious and unlawful conduct. An example of “The Ruse” goes something like this: placing an unidentified call at my workplace, the return of the apparent business transaction became record for the allegation of aggravated stalking. And this *device* has been used more than once as a weapon of family destruction: this violation of her law has been practiced in several forms and on several occasions. She has misused *The System* designed to protect the abused—without being implicated of any wrongdoing or cause. She is *above the law*.

The history of social-service abuses includes what seems like an endless account and report of waste and fraud (of that reported!) But the issue at hand—the wrongful application and authorization of legal protection—deals with the deepest and most difficult of family or domestic government. I do not doubt the real need for protecting family or individuals, but I find the misuse (and its tolerance) as beneath contempt. The misuse of such government services has adverse effects on those who sincerely need and deserve protection; and it perpetuates the destruction of the family by implicating (and incarcerating) good intentions and healthy choices of parenting.

Again, the courts are complicit in “the schemes”; courts enable and encourage divorce and its schemes. For me, the conduct of “the schemes” has included criminal court for the two incarcerations; and in criminal court, a continuation of misuses in the form of unjustified implication of the children, the *plea bargain* and expedience.

Expedience involves the courts’ widespread use of the *plea agreement*. In its genesis, the *plea bargain* was merely the product of courts inundated with cases; it was a way for the courts to “expedite” prosecutions and thereby enhance performance (of convictions...with minimal costs) while maintaining some semblance of control of case load. The *plea bargain* has a variety of forms—of which I admittedly do not understand—but *in the rough*, it compels the defendant to testify or confess his wrongdoing. The choice to testify is influenced but the possibility—if not certainty—of a tougher punishment...presumably resulting from a trial.

In the book, *The Tyranny of Good Intentions*, Paul Roberts and Lawrence Stratton described the plea bargain as “slow torture”. Effectually outlawed for the Rights of Englishmen, the *plea*

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bargain was considered threatening for its possibility (or plausibility) of abuses—not the least of which is to assume “the charged” as guilty...rather than innocent. I hesitate to mention the matter at the risk that I could be wrong in the minutia and vagaries of the law. Again, I am not educated in the law, but only a parent who has pursued some understanding through observation and experience...and the loss of his family among other things. My reasons for mentioning (and briefly describing) the *plea bargain*:

1. The plea bargain enables guilt to be essentially imposed at the time of the charge—rather than by trial. If a parent is given the choice of pleading no-contest in lieu of the expressed intention of having his children subjected to a court appearance (or to testify), he may plead (as I did). In other words, the non-custodial is guilty the moment that the other parent initiates a charge....lending to the prevailing risk of being arrested on the whim of another. Authority is abused when the custodial parent can arbitrarily convict the other parent.
2. The plea bargain benefits the courts by deferring the cost of a trial (and possibly exoneration of the defendant); and it benefits the attorney because no one loses (the case); but what it does not do is necessarily benefit the parent who has been charged for a crime against his family. My children have not exchanged a word with me in about eight years (as of 2009), yet the investigator evidently included their testimonies (or affidavits). If the public defender was right (or expressed intentions were earnest), the prosecution would have included the children’s court appearance for same.

Continuing on the *plea bargain*:

3. These schemes—seemingly encouraged by the law enforcement and prosecution—are *beneath contempt* too; as the children are being (or have been) exploited on the basis of expedience.

I have made it clear that my ex-wife has leveraged the children in her schemes. If the prosecution would like a “real definition” of the word “malicious”, then I think I can oblige. In another recent writing of mine—an essay of sort—I pose the question: “How far will a parent go to destroy the other parent...or at least destroy the parent-child relationship?” I respond (in my essay) in a context of what is understood by the psychiatric community (in terms of such treatment of children):

The consequences of such maltreatment or misuse of the children are well understood by the psychiatric community; yet the liberties of such parents (as already described) do not stop with the best interest of the children. Indeed, the children become another tool to be leveraged in “the arsenal” of the parent left unchecked of their own *devices*.

I continue with some indication of both the “perception” (the profile of a victim) and “possession” (“that is more than nine tenths of the law...it is the law!”) of this behavior in the context of “the war”:

Thus, the one alleging or parading to be the abused becomes the principle abuser of the true victims, the children. Where possession is said to be nine-tenths of the law, both “the system” and children become tools for the parent’s purpose, however maniacal.

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While the court's seemed to be duped by the powers of "perception" and "possession", personal acquaintances are not. Once seemingly life-long friends have long learned that "the profile of a victim" has no merit in the words (and actions) of my ex-wife. Though these once-friends may have made a Herculean effort at trying (to be friends), they eventually realized that such a relationship was impossible. They too had experienced and succumbed to the strong winds, the tempest and all its fury; and have undoubtedly endured "Oar Over-Easy" and "Demarcation Drawing" among other possibilities....

My understanding of the details of all such personal acquaintances lacks completeness. I have spoke on a rare occasion with two—of which I largely build the claim and condition. I suppose my less-than objective approach to such matters is somewhat like my observation of the courts and due-process. The courts seldom in ever consider all testimony and any "validated" evidence in their perusal and case study; but seem to follow the course of making decisions more on their own interests and expedience. To my credit however, I admit my limits and shortcomings; while the courts—like my ex-wife—take no responsibility for theirs....

Using what little evidence that I can obtain, theses relationships of by-gone years have been terminated by a combination of falsehoods and fatigue. Several years ago, I received a call from one of these former, long-term acquaintances. She informed me that she was no longer a friend of my ex-wife—a relationship that had intermittently lasted beyond the length of our marriage. What was the *final straw*; what happened in their relationship (that had included this woman allowing my ex-wife and children to live with her)? She didn't say; but I didn't have to ask either.

I know that friendships can be severed—just as marriage and family relationships—but what is particularly intriguing about this broken relationship is that she called me to explain in succinct, but certain words. She called me in spite of the long-term silence of one who had befriended my wife before our marriage, maintained sporadic contact through our marriage, and supported by ex-wife and children post-marriage. I did not ask her to explain or elaborate; perhaps, I was shocked (by the call) and could not muster the moment to respond. I listened and tried to *fill in the lines*—but was not surprised of yet another relationship left in the wake of the juggernaut...left damaged by *the wind*.

Another friend (mentioned in an earlier chapter as a somewhat-mother type) was also among the ravages of “the war”. After several years of direct participation in the care of our oldest children, she finally *declared a withdrawal*. Some years later, around the time of the divorce, she did momentarily *reengage* in the way of a letter. A letter of her expression of the matters surrounding my wife’s intended divorce and our marital relationship; and a letter or “the letter” that somehow got into the hands of my daughter. Needless to say, the letter was efficiently dismissed as *crossing the line* (or “Demarcation Drawing”); but I’m not sure what my daughter thought....

Of any other acquaintances or friends, I am not certain of past or present circumstances or conditions. What concerns me most is the relationship between the children and their mother—both in the present and the future.

Non-Custodial Navigating

Again from my essay, the following possibilities:

Over time, some children come to see *the writing on the wall*; the hard truth that a parent endowed with their complete trust has deceived, threatened and abused for the central purpose of destroying the other parent.

And what may follow for them too, but the strong winds:

What's more, they fall prey to similar treatment (as their father has known) should their discovery reach fruition. In other words, the children (as adults) may experience shame and ridicule should they seek out the parent long lost by the undoing of the courts. In the experience of such dysfunctional relations is the very real matter of abuse that may be overlooked by the self-proclaimed advocates of the children.

And while the courts focus their attention on “the perpetrator”:

While the courts are busy punishing the one parent on pretense or making a political statement in the form of *preemptive prosecution*, the real abuser is busy wielding the law and implicating the children in her schemes.

And what of their future, the children...the true victims:

Again, the consequences can be extreme as examined, analyzed and reported by an unbiased and unadulterated psychiatric community.

In the worst of possible outcomes would be one or more children shattered by the experience described above; the realization that the relationship most trusted is replete with lies and deception. But the damage does not stop there— simply because the young adult must now try to *pick-up the pieces* and rediscover, if possible, a relationship torn asunder over the expressed pursuit of personal happiness (or parent-child destruction) at any cost.

“Non-Custodial Navigating” is a difficult—even perilous—course or journey. In appreciation for the adventures in the *days of yore*, the journey is more a quest—fraught with many dangers and encumbrances along the way. I have tried to prepare you, the reader, on the prospect that you may have embarked on this daunting role as a non-custodial. *Heaven forbid* that my children will ever have to endure such a course or journey. If they be exposed to such pain and peril, let it be for something honorable and noble—not for the promises and love of a parent.



Fight Fighting

Restraining orders, injunctions, and stalking have become the devices used to alienate this parent from his children. What is ironic is that the means to protect the “abused” is being abused by the so-called “abused”....

The series of misuses of the restraining order should, by now, be understood. Indeed, the misuse or misapplication has become a tactical step of many pre-divorce plans and a tool—rather than legal aid—for those claiming to be victims in some capacity. The convenience of such “legal aids” has given rise to the credence of Lord Acton’s statement that “absolute power corrupts absolutely”.

As a tool, the injunction has given the necessary *fire power* to profile the parent as potentially dangerous, and to ensure that “the war” is reduced to a besieged parent, family, and community. Falsifying such documents as a necessary justification is perjury; but with my observation and experience, such motives have been overlooked (with complete impunity) so as allow any testimony. When one parent is given the *license to lie*, conscience becomes the safeguard or demarcation for truth and honesty. Because the legal protection is misused however, all aforementioned parties (parent, children, and community) suffer

as a consequence; and moreover, the courts have seemingly foregone the basis for justice—that is, the truth!

Only in movies can I recall the pledge or oath: “I swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.” In my own court experiences, I have no recollection of the use of the described oath and, through events, have witnessed and observed the practice of perjury without the presumed protocol, prevention or punishment. The combination of this *license* (to lie), the *latitude to legislative* and *longitude* to be *above the law*, places one parent at the mercy of the judge and the other in the judge’s seat. How such protocol can be framed in “family law” I do not know; for to me, this perfunctory practice of unsubstantiated or outlandish allegations is just perjury.

My belief is steeped in the *old law* that says: if a witness is found to falsely testify against another, then the witness will be given the same punishment as that intended for the accused. If such law was protocol, the divorce would have awarded the children to me...and would have punished my wife with the same punishment that I received. As to the children, they would likely still have some form of relationship with their mother; unless of course, perjury continued to be her practice. As the case goes (and continues to go), the witness is given unbridled privilege to say anything...and say it again...and again, if necessary! I call her practice, “recurring themes”; *recurring themes amid the sordid schemes....*

*“Why not fight
this injunction;
why not...”*

Some readers may have asks the question in prior chapters, “Why not fight this injunction; why not present the argument that the injunction is

falsified?” Not necessarily responding to the hypothetical question, I have tried through an inquiry: a young attorney

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representing me in the first misdemeanor (on violation of the injunction). He briefly replied (to my inquiry) that injunctions have “many layers”. I interpreted his brief reply as that the injunction could be contested, but the transaction could (or would) cost a lot of money. In the financing of “the war”, she (the ex-wife) is able to illicit the authority of the law on the taxpayer’s dole while I must combat the falsified document using my own sources. How does one combat such a formidable foe...funded by the state...and by child support?

My immediate response *brings to the surface* that “City Hall” stands on the side of the proclaimed victim with a host of resources poised to react at any moment. The outcast, malevolent parent—far more often the male—is faced with the worst of possible circumstances: subjected to courts that use such “slow torture” as the *plea bargain*, while giving impunity to one witness (and one witness only), leaves little uncertainty as to his conviction regardless of the truth.

In November 2007, my probation officer informed me (on my inquiry) that I had violated my probation by violating the injunction. In my effort to understand the details—with further inquiry to the Sheriff’s office—the matter proved that a warrant could be issued without any details (or legitimate) evidence. Neither the probation office nor the Sheriff’s office could provide any detail (or basis) for the warrant. In other words, the cause for warrant was not documented or made clear—which was admittedly puzzling to the Sheriff’s office.

Again, I don’t want to delve into the minutia of the law, but I do think that this warrant was more the matter of “manufacturing” than any legitimate cause. The following summer (2008), during my stay in that county’s jail, this case (the misdemeanor or VOP) would reveal that the prosecution never

had any legitimate or relevant evidence. Yes, the warrant was “manufactured” through the practice (or policy) of law that seemingly foregoes the otherwise need for a cause. Outdated evidence was presented at the initial hearing; the second hearing was re-scheduled (presumably because the prosecution had no new evidence), and the final hearing presented the aggravated stalking charge—that was filed six months after the warrant... or in April, 2008. The moral to this story could be summed-up as this: the authority can issue a warrant without specific cause; and, without legitimate evidence, the authority can detain you for as long as the judge is tolerable or agreeable. In laymen’s terms, an explanation might go like this: “Mr. _____, we don’t have any evidence but, give us time, as we are looking for it...and though the warrant was from 2007, we now intend to use a charge from 2008.” Did they merely anticipate that the probation would be violated? Can the prosecutor also be a prognosticator—exercising some type of preemptive punishment? Do they have a crystal ball for criminalization?

The term, “preemptive war” *comes to mind*: nations or armies justify war by attacking (and possible decimating) their enemy on the premise that “their enemy” is preparing to do the same...in some degree. The above description of the warrant, while perhaps over simplified, has application to preemptive war: as the armies justify their strikes, so too the local authorities justified the warrant as a form of “preemptive prosecution”; that is, a first strike to hedge the anticipated violation of probation. Such tactics in “the war” can apparently be deployed regardless of the presumed practice, protocol or policy. *The victim* is apparently given the full and unbridled privilege to summon the authorities with a statement alone—if that is even necessary.

Fight Fighting

The *plea bargain* is used in over ninety percent of criminal cases. As a defendant, I have witnessed firsthand the use and application of this expedient form of prosecution. From my personal experience, what makes this method so effective is the ability to mislead or misinform—on top of the advantages or “bargain” aforementioned. When I agreed to “no contest” regarding the charge of aggravated stalking, I was told (in writing) that I was not found guilty or was not a convicted felon. Months later, on my release and probation, I discovered that public records presented a conviction and guilt; that is, the opposite of what I was told in writing. Who is right, or who is telling the truth in the contradiction?

The *plea bargain* has further power to mislead or misinform the defendant. In the general public, such power might be described once again as a *license to lie*. If the truth does not matter in the basis of an injunction and the testimony of *the victim*, why should it matter to the council or the court? The apparent disregard for truth or honesty seems to go beyond the conscience of *the victim* and, by all indication, is practiced by the prosecution as well.

Years ago, my brother tried to warn me of “the long arms” of the law; the arms that can seek you out, *pluck you up* without cause, and crush you with the figurative and formidable “heavy hand”.

...my brother
tried to warn me
of “the long
arms”...

He was right; and in the metaphorical description is the *plea bargain*.

The *plea bargain* can conceivably preempt any need for a legitimate investigation or evidence: who needs evidence when you have the leverage to compel the so-called “presumed innocent” to confess their guilt? With this force (or juggernaut) is

the “preemptive strike” of the gavel; or in laymen’s terms, you were guilty the moment you were charged. Forget the notion or myth of

- *Innocence until proven guilty*
- *The burden of proof*
- *Beyond a reasonable doubt*
- *Facing your accusers*

All of the terms above—and any other so-called rights—become moot in the presence and power of the *plea bargain*. The prosecution is the judge! As to an investigation and evidence...what’s the point?

Some have (or would) argue that the defendant receives a lesser crime; but such rationalism negates *presumed innocence*—or assumes that every defendant is guilty as charged. Such sentiments imply that the Rights of Englishmen have no application or bearing. *Due-process*—as the collective term for these “rights”—is deferred in the name of expedience. As to William Blackstone: *Justice has left the building!*

I may be repetitive on these topics of concern, like the *plea bargain*; but the topic is worth repeating or rehashing. The genesis of this “preemptive prosecution” was to address excessive case load...in full view of history (that prohibited the *plea bargain* in the Rights of Englishmen). As a defendant, I have witnessed the *plea bargain* at work in negotiating guilt and ensuring conviction quotas. In my mind, the *plea bargain* is not justice, but is the “long arms” and “heavy hand” of a figure bearing no resemblance to *Lady Justice*.

Fight Fighting

I conclude this particular topic with a summary from *The Tyranny of Good Intentions* written by Paul Roberts and Lawrence Stratton:

Only if the legal system actively seeks truth can society carry out the retributive and punitive aspects of justice. Otherwise, innocent people who do not deserve retribution will be treated unjustly. Moreover, if punishment is meted out bureaucratically, without concern for the guilt or innocence, the legal system loses its majesty. (82-94)

Another reason for repeating these “topics of concern” is to convince the reader of the sheer power and position of the authorities in the juggernaut (family, civil, and criminal). *The System* seems predisposed to provide every benefit and privilege to those willing “to accuse” as Stephen Baskerville explains in “Divorced from Reality”:

Yet patently false accusations of both child abuse and domestic violence are rampant in divorce courts, almost always for purposes of breaking up families, securing child custody, and eliminating fathers.

“With child abuse and spouse abuse you don’t have to prove anything,” the leader of a legal seminar tells divorcing mothers, according to the Chicago Tribune. “You just have to accuse.”

Accused and compelled (to plead), the defendant “does not stand a chance” as said by one of several of my attorneys.

Still assessing the arsenal of weapons in “the war”, I have discovered that mental evaluations can be lethal toward implicating the defendant. The mental evaluation—as ordered by the courts—has three apparent purposes:

1. To confirm some cause for concern so as to bolster the argument that the parent is unfit (to be an active or participating parent). Of course, the injunction has proven that such conclusions—even a history—is unnecessary...as such a cause can be fabricated....
2. To imply or suggest some cause for concern. Should the results not bode favorable to such a predisposition however, the evaluation can then be devalued or disregarded on pretense—delaying or negating further consideration....
3. To delay decisions or to impose spurious issues that, in some tactical way, may benefit the plaintiff, prosecution or general processes of the court.

From the authors (Bernard Gaulier, Judith Margerum, Jerome A. Price, James Windell) of the book, *Defusing the High-Conflict Divorce*:

...Sometimes however, requests for psychological evaluations are simply stall tactics intended to delay a decision. The delay caused by carrying out an order for a psychological evaluation could make things worse because it gives hope and power to the child and to the violating parent. (128)

Fight Fighting

My personal history of medical evaluations began in 2003 when, in an attempt to plead for reunification with my children, was ordered to take a “parental inventory”. Costing well over a thousand dollars (at my expense), the evaluation was conducted by a court-ordered psychiatrist. The prognosis or summary of the one-day evaluation:

The data are quite robust in pointing out that he does not show vulnerability to react to parent child stressors by becoming physically abusive.

Thus, Mr. Rainer does not present as a danger to his children’s welfare on an emotional or physical basis.

In the court’s follow-up on my plea (for reunification), the evaluation was mentioned only by the attorney representing my ex-wife; and I distinctly remember him describing the evaluation as having “alarming” content. Obviously, the attorney used the second of three “apparent purposes”; he devalued its importance using pretense—negating further consideration....

A second evaluation was ordered in December 2006 in conjunction with my arrest (for attending my children’s ball game). Called the Baker Act in Florida, this evaluation is designed for patients (or persons) considered suicidal or homicidal.

Approving the need for the evaluation, a representative of the Health Department conducted a pre-evaluation that lasted about twenty minutes. I remember him asking me if I was angry about anything. Responsively, I said “no”—of which he replied, “Hell man, I’m angry about something....”

From the pre-evaluation (of the Health Department), I was described as being paranoid and delusional (in grandeur); hence, I was carted-off to the local hospital, or “Baker Acted”. The psychiatric ward offered the following evaluation summary:

At the time of my evaluation, the patient was absolutely showing no evidence of paranoia and absolutely no delusions of grandeur...He was telling me a logical, consistent story about the unfortunate history of being divorced and not being able to see his children...

Continuing with the Baker Act summary:

There is nothing in the Baker Act that gives me reason to think he is a danger to himself or others “and there is no substantial likelihood that without peer treatment, the person will cause serious bodily harm to himself or another person in the near future, as evidenced by recent behaviors” This is what was checked on the Baker Act and, in fact, is not correct. Additionally, the Baker Act stated that “said person is unable to determine for himself/herself whether examination is necessary,” and that indeed is not the case either.

Several staff at the hospital expressed some criticism of the health department representative—as to his credentials and, in turn, his qualification to conduct such a pre-evaluation. Perhaps the representative was just acting with expedience...but maybe not.

One final point on the Baker Act (and the subsequent hearing in June of the following year): on my arrival in the courtroom, the judge inquired about the Baker Act (or the report and summary), but she did not have a copy for her perusal. I had authorized release of the results on my discharge that prior

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December; thus, the prosecution would have received the summary—ostensibly as part of the case submittals. Why was the judge not presented with the summary or outcome? I believe that the Baker Act summary was purposely omitted because of the first of three “apparent purposes”; it did not “bolster the argument that the parent is unfit”. In my observation and experience, I think the mental evaluation should be defined as:

An examination that can be ordered by the court without any medical evidence or history—or any other evidence; for which once complete, is of no consequence to the case unless the results prove-positive to the prosecution.

A third evaluation was ordered in conjunction with the court’s judgment in September 2008 (irrespective of the two previous evaluation in 2003 and 2006... presented to the prosecution in 2008). My public defender explained that the evaluation was “just so the court could cover their ass.” But maybe, “expedience” is a more suitable excuse.... Whatever the excuse, the court did not provide guidelines or details to the appointed medical service; thus giving rise to the intention of the prosecution as stated by the public defender. Responding without any guidance from the court, the medical agency completed the evaluation:

The patient is stable and there is no evidence that depression, mania, or psychosis. There is no evidence of events to harm self or others. It is noted that he has significant stress related to his inability to see his children, and that has caused him to have some mild depression which is self limited. He is seeking to re-establish his past success in life. However, his charges have stood in the way of his progress.

I am not sure which one of the “apparent purposes” might apply to this third of three evaluations, but what’s certain is that the courts considered it “so serious” that they could not offer any guidelines or details to the medical agency. Let’s just call it the obligatory evaluation that ensures an alibi for the courts—if needed in the future. Remember the three R’s of the courts....

One, two and three evaluations spanning five years; and one, two, and three “apparent purposes” for evaluations by the courts or prosecution. Yet, the intention is not earnest and the process is not encompassing; for when the merit (of the evaluation) is based on bolstering the position of the prosecution, authority is being abused. In the vein of expedience—where *the end justifies*

the means—evaluations are just another item in the arsenal of the juggernaut.

*Other weapons
of family
destruction
include....*

Other *weapons of family destruction* include the “recurring themes”—as another “device” to heighten, even illicit, the attention and action of the authorities. For example, my ex-wife

has used the recurring theme (over several years) of an outstanding or otherwise unattended medical evaluation. Used repeatedly, this alleged evaluation is apparently *over and above* the multiple evaluations already completed. Other themes allude to mental and emotional problems, instability and other derogatory and potentially-inflammatory conduct—all of which is without any reported or submitted evidence. In other words, she has lied. When do the “recurring themes” end? They may never end...given the *license to lie*.

In early April 2008, or two months before my arrest, I saw one of my children while she was on travel in Georgia with the marching band. I did not approach her (or the other students)

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but did see her from afar; and in turn, left a backpack with the adults waiting on the bus. The backpack contained letters and birthday monies. The account of this “sighting” was captured in an affidavit used in the subsequent charge of aggravated stalking. My daughter expressed her fear that she, along with her friends, would be attacked by me; but in the same testimony or affidavit, she was not sure that she even saw me (or recognized me)—but expressed her fear on learning that I had been *there* (after she returned to the bus).

A shorter testimony by my son—who was not on the trip—described his graduation gift as “a bribe”. The gift, mailed to his home, included a notebook computer, backpack, book and card. He described the condition of the computer: it was crushed to the degree that the casing was damaged and the disk drive would not eject (or was inoperable). The package had been packed well, was insured, and marked as fragile. Quite possibly, my son’s gift was purposely and maliciously destroyed...before giving it to him. Who would do such a thing? Who would destroy a gift, and then present it to the intended? Maybe the computer was crushed by a strong gust of wind?

This latest case (as briefly described above) marks my *situational awareness* to a new development in “the war”; that is, implicating the children in the deception. I have long known the deception practiced by her but, until this case, did not realize that depth at which deception has been used in programming the children. Comments from both my son and daughter give every reason to accept that they have been duped into the belief that their father is dangerous and conniving. Such a belief or behavior is not the result of our relationship (father and children) prior to divorce; but it (the belief) may be classified as *collateral damage* in the context of the analogous war.

“Fight Fighting” *comes down* to the powerful force called love. The choice to love may not have any bearing on the case, the court, or the described “collateral damage” suffered by the children. In this choice (of love) are many costs—both financial and intangible—that can be simply described as:

- Being arrested at the work place
- Being incarcerated...and consequently losing my job
- Being convicted and, because of my criminal background check, not being able to be reemployed in my profession and industry
- Being denied the means to resume my child support...with the risks of further incarceration for arrears.

As long as the courts continue in the practices and policies of no-fault divorce (or the juggernaut), parents will be at risk at losing their privileges and responsibilities through no fault of their own. In other words, “the war” is an assault on parents (or parenting)...and not on my family alone.

On this eve of Christmas, I am reminded of the birth of a child as a wonderful, miraculous event; but I am also reminded of the maniacal effort to destroy that child as a reaction to fear and the coming truth. What degree or effort will a person exert to preserve their role...and to quash the truth in the process? How can they justify such effort (or a cause)—assuming that they are willing and able to accept accountability for their actions, their motives? History bears out that some would destroy even their own family and children—and either deny their actions or deny those who demand accountability.



Undone Undoing

“A right time to search and another to count your losses, a
right time to hold on and another to let go, a right
time...to mend...”

- Ecclesiastes, *The Message*

In this closing chapter, I will turn the topic to the general future; a future where there may be some opportunity for me to help undo what has been undone. If what I have presented so far is not a clear example of how the courts can destroy families and create criminals, then perhaps I have been remiss in the content and conclusions. But whether you are convinced or not, much has been undone as to the strength and viability of the family. In “the war” on my own family, the future of my children—their adult lives and potential families—*hangs in the balance* in large part because their parents did not keep their promises. But the law is complicit in enabling convenient divorce...and the consequences.

The book of Ecclesiastes is one of my favorite; and in fact, I have used the book as the inspiration for a collection of essays under the title, *For a Time & Season*. This collection, that is still a work-in-process, includes: “A Time for Jail” and “Season of Scales”—both of which are accounts of my arrests and incarceration. Behind the presented or planned collection of

writing is the rich content of Ecclesiastes (that stems from the presumption that life is all vanity). In the closing words of the last chapter, King Solomon:

But regarding anything beyond this, dear friend, go easy. There's no end to the publishing of books, and constant study wears you out so you're no good for anything else. The last and final word is this: Fear God. Do what he tells you.

And that's it. Eventually God will bring everything that we do out into the open and judge it according to its hidden intent, whether it's good or evil.

With these final and encouraging words of *The Message*, I begin this last chapter of my book—though in no way, the last chapter of a once-father. I was once, I am, and I will always be my children's father. As to those individuals who have tried so desperately to destroy the fact, I offer forgiveness and seek reconciliation. As to the institutions that have supported the effort to destroy the fact, I pray that: *Lady Justice* will seek the truth rather than excuse it; and that she will extol the American family rather than destroy it.

Among the reserved resources of my writing is *The Father and Child Reunion* by Warren Farrell. I elaborate on some excerpts because the theme coincides with the concept of undoing what has been undone, or “Undone Undoing”. In presenting the potential role of a father, the fundamental question: **Why is dad crucial (to his family)?** The answer to this question may not seem obvious—as I remind you of the notion that a father is “superfluous” to the family. Family law is clearly amiss to the crucial role that fathers have in the family, and has been instrumental in dismantling dads from the mantle of responsibility in family life. From my reading, many support

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organizations and allied research understands that dads do matter and, as I've shared, have been instrumental in bringing to light this crucial contribution.

Warren Farrell addresses some of the myths (or less reported facts) of the father, his value and benefit to the family.

- A study by the Journal of Social Issues, reports that boys who live with their fathers (after divorce) have a higher degree of self-esteem, are more mature, and more independent than boys who live with their mothers.
- Even when the mother and father make the same or similar income, the children that live with their father (full-time) did better ¹than those who lived with their mother.
- Children in a shared-parent time arrangement ² were found to have higher self-esteem (especially girls); and be more happy, and less impatient than children who have limited or no contact with their fathers or other parent. (43)

Similar statistics (that report the benefits of the father and child...living arrangements) have been reported in *Father Facts* (5th Edition) by the National Fatherhood Initiative. What is particularly important is that the described “myths” are less reported (or accepted) among those who have initiated and continue to preserve no-fault divorce. For the growing disparity of dads within families (or the fatherless) is the premise that fathers are not needed beyond the fertilization of the egg and the worth of their income, if that.

¹ “did better” refers to behavioral problems and associated academic problems

² “shared-parent” is joint custody (following divorce) where the children and parents live in the same community, and custody is shared equally between parents – rather than disproportional parenting...

Farrell describes the limited possibilities when financing is not available in “the war”; that cash is a clear *force multiplier*:

Economically, a dad who doesn't have the money to hire a lawyer each time such a decision (of custody or other issue of divorce...post-divorce) might be made, should be especially aware of how vulnerable he might be should his children not live with him. (51)

Of course, the financing of the custodial parent may very well be sourced through the child-support obligation. This financing (of the opposition) is analogous to the *unintended consequence* of modern international policy and diplomacy—where payments to one party are somehow channeled to the opposition...or the supposed ally is actually the enemy.

One possible factor that contributes to the lesser benefit of children (or boys) living with a single-parent is described as the “Single Parent Syndrome”. Raising children is challenging for two parents, but one parent alone—perhaps the initiator of the divorce—must contend with a fear of rejection, as Dr. Farrell writes:

Being needy of their children—both as a friend and someone who makes them feel needed; they (the parent) fear their child rejecting them. The possibility of conflict with her child makes a single mother fear she is a failure as a spouse, so ‘maybe no one’ can get along with me and the divorce is my fault. Fearing additional rejection, she is unwilling to enforce consequences for disobedience. However, the degree to which she fears her child's rejection is the degree to which her children sense her fears, test her boundaries, and drive her to exhaustion. (59)

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A similar situation may have developed in my own family: my older children expressed that the youngest child was “getting away with murder”. Such changes of control or discipline were creating expressed frustration in my children—anger as I had never seen before.

If the post-divorce precipitates further divisiveness (or “the war”), the non-custodial is similarly effected with resentment and, alienated from his children, is less likely to pay child support. Farrell reports that fathers that have custody rights with their children made full and on time payments 79 percent of the time; but “when seeing their children is undermined or denied, only 56% paid child support.”

The nature of a man is such that when his family is taken from him, he is inclined to leave his family. The intervention and regulation of his role by other authorities is detrimental to his role as dad; and, in response, he disregards his role.... I am well aware of “the nature” (as are many men); but sadly, the courts do not care about such nature of the conventional family. Warren draws a striking parallel between the contemporary child support model and legalized slavery in America. He writes:

The U.S. has one other experience trying to get people to work by force without the fruits of their labor adding to their ability to give and receive their families’ love. It was called slavery. (62)

Another myth on the subject of child support is the described “deadbeat dad”. Already addressed in earlier chapters, this designation is the least understood—simply because the general public is misinformed...or cannot conceive the *rawness* of this role.

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On this misunderstood matter, Mr. Farrell writes:

When you consider that 42% of mothers present barriers and 54% of fathers see their children weekly, despite the fact that three-quarters of custodial mothers move at least once within the first four years of divorce, we get a different image than that of the “dead-beat dad” portrayed by the media and based on surveys of women only. (62)

The greatest loss of my life has been, to date, my children and family. The unwarranted and unjustified removal of my role has led to the brokenness to write this book, and to believe that love is able to overcome what I have called the juggernaut. Yet the suffering for families cannot be denied....

Also described in previous chapters is how words (and actions) can be used to effectively destroy the father and child relationship. As one of an arsenal of *weapons of family destruction*, words can lead to the children’s apparent laxity in desiring visitation and can lead to resentment and anger toward their father. The practice of these tactics has its *unintended consequences* too, as Warren explains:

Mothers who bad-mouthed fathers eventually produced children who resented their mother more than their father. One additional testimony (of a daughter): “The worst thing about the divorce was that I saw my mother for the person she really is.” (106)

Such “bath-mouthing” and undermining occurred in my own experience: when my eight year old daughter asks me why I had abandoned them (the children), I was reminded of the degree at which she (the mother) was willing to go to destroy what remained of our relationship.

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Our land has over thirty million children who have no contact with their natural father; during this holiday season (December 2009) about one-third of our countries' children did not see or have contact with their natural father. For those who cannot conceive the consequences of such a national crisis, consider these words of Dr. Farrell in *Father and Child Reunion*:

Sending a father-deprived child into the world and assuming everything is okay is like sending a drunken driver onto the highway and assuming everything is okay because the gas is paid for. It doesn't mean that the drunken driver want get to his destination. It just means that the risks are enormous. And the consequences of failure are forever. (122)

In the last chapter, "Fight Fighting", I described some aspects of "the war" and cause to engage. My effort to defeat (or to dissolve) the injunction would hardly be the last of "the war". The practices and policies of the courts remain decisively favorable for the *license* to commit lies, the *latitude* to make law, and the *longitude* to "operate" *above the law*. Until the pendulum swings—or until the destruction reaches *critical mass*—"the system" will continue to encourage and enable convenient divorce and its consequences. As far as financing "the war", the non-custodial may have to take a lesson from the present-day war on terrorism: financing, whether with wealth or debt, is not always the solution—if there is one! Lest we forget the power of *special interests* that stand behind the "do-gooders" and, thereby, obfuscate the populous with misinformation, even myths.

*My effort...
would hardly be
the last of "the
war".*

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As to war in the *domestic theater*, Warren describes the dilemma:

A dad who is economically poor has virtually no chance of being an equally involved dad without his ex-wife's permission. So he loses without a contest. (153)

But financing is not a sure thing as Dr. Farrell describes:

A father with some money soon learns investing in a court case against an unwilling mom is like buying a lottery ticket for \$100,000 and seriously hoping to win. So he too loses without a contest. (153)

And as far as a "solution", the father may just give-up on being an active parent:

Sometimes a dad's sense of powerlessness makes him withdraw. We call him a deadbeat. It's usually more accurate to call him deadened. (153)

Finally, he describes the "Dad-Time Catch-22":

If he cares enough about his children to fight for them legally, he cares enough not to want to put them through a legal battle. (153)

Potentially because of love, the father may choose to withdraw; he may realize that the costs—monetary or otherwise—are too great.

Sometimes his decision is to altogether give-up; that is, he decides that life is not worth living any more. The shocking statistic of this decision is described: "men are ten times more likely to commit suicide than women in post-divorce circumstances."

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Warren elaborates on the significant difference:

When we demand a dad give child support...then take away his children and home, we kill his soul, his reason for earning, his reason for living. When we drive him into a dead-end, he becomes a deadbeat, dead broke, or just dead. As a dad's death is forced upon him, with him dies his family's soul. (174)

This description above represents a literal casualty of “the war”. In a vague analogy with the Native American and legalized slavery, the father is indebted to pay for children that have been taken from him and, in desperation, is driven into exile, even eradication.

Meanwhile, *The System* seems to be largely oblivious to the organized abuse incurred by the children; the “collateral damage”. Mr. Farrell explains:

Denial of parent time is one of the deepest forms of child abuse exactly because stepping into a child's life is like stepping into the proverbial river that is never again the same. (198)

Again, the support organizations and allied research has long realized the ramifications of parental alienation; a dichotomy is clearly the case when the courts simply ignore such conclusions.

Other weapons in the arsenal have been described in previous chapters, but to reiterate the possibilities is to first consider that the *rules of engagement* do not equally apply. The authority of the state stands with the mother (and

...consider that the rules of engagement do not equally apply.

against the father) as precedence and practice have long attested. Exceptions may exist, but what I describe is “a rule”.

Another weapon is commonly referred to as the “abuse card”. In this weapon—of great potential and power—is the capability to both implicate and incriminate the parent. With the authority of the state, a parent can effectively ruin the role of another parent based on nothing but a statement. Forget the family history and other witnesses; the role of that parent is now under the rule (and regulation) of criminal law. As in my case, a parent can be criminalized—made so by the maliciousness for which he is accused...and she has committed. In a vague sense of methods used by Nazi Germany, the aggressor is cloaked in the pretense of a victim; thus, the ruthlessness accepted as protection and defensiveness. Of course, the *call to arms* is met with the full measure of the law...and “the war” marches on for the *special interests*.

Facing an enemy is not what the other parent wants—realizing the destructiveness on several fronts. Already reeling from the consequences of the divorce, the non-custodial is overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the opponent’s resourcefulness and resolve. What he may have seen in this once-wife stands is in complete contrast to the compromises made to justify “the war” and win at all costs. Again, he may be financing the war...and his own demise.

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With the described war is also an *internal war*; the non-custodial is struggling with his sentiments—his subsiding sensitivity to the needs or desires of his children, as Warren explains:

When a dad's child is dead to him, but still alive, he can never begin the process of mourning; he can never heal. We feel this unhealed hurt and bitterness when we meet dads who are denied their children. (198)

Perhaps the dad accepts the figurative death as a natural way of coping with the loss; but whatever the explanation, he is torn by his “subsiding sensitivity” as though a sense of betrayal of what he once so dearly cherished—and still may....

Once the *house is divided*, the division may continue as “the war”. And while war rages on in some degree, the children continue to be part of the costs. Lasting well into the adulthood—and perhaps a lifetime—anger and its allies may be the most prevalent inheritance that children receive from a severed family. From the classic study by Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances*, the following:

Ten years after divorce, close to one-half of the boys, who are now between the ages of nineteen and twenty-nine, are unhappy and lonely and have had few, if any, lasting relationships with women. (67)

While the above quote does not directly suggest anger, it does offer the possible cause and effect of children thrust into an unwanted, sometimes unjustified war; the consequences of which have been seemingly ignored or distorted by the *special interests* and proponents of no-fault divorce.

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If children matter, than whom more to *stand in the gap* than their parents; yet sadly, the parents (or a parent) can ironically become the chief enemy for which the children may hold in contempt...rather than care. Under the “abuse card”, the custodial parent has the aforementioned ability to operate as a double agent: on the one-side, the protector and caretaker; while on the other side, the divider and abuser. Similarly, the state can be integral to *The System* of dismantling the dad while appearing (and attesting) to be acting in the best interest of the children. Within the second of these two is *the divorce industry* that has benefited from the *spoils of war* without regard to the incomparable costs borne by our community and culture. The complicit nature of this dual affect is a juggernaut that takes absolute authority in—but no responsibility for—the decimating of families and the demise of fatherhood. Even with such a force however is the call for love to last and endure; because only then, can the undoing begin to restore what has been undone.

Worthy Words

While experiencing and explaining this personal war, I have become more aware of the large-scale war waged on the American family. As one minister shared with me recently (and as reminded by Promise Keepers years ago), men are desperately needed to “stand in the gap” in the most critical crisis of our time, our society, and our culture.

As a parent—though alienated from my children—I am also acutely aware of the privilege (of being a parent); therefore, to those who have and do commit themselves to this most valuable vocation, I hope your children (and their children) will appreciate it. To the alienated or separated parents who want the same; I hope and pray for reconciliation and restoration of these relationships—that your children and their children will come to appreciate it too.

One additional party that has not been directly mentioned is the grandparents who suffer the losses—and most often, through no fault of their own. I have witnessed a growing population of grandparents that are becoming *de facto* parents. But at the other extreme is those grandparents denied access to grandchildren for whom they may have been deeply involved, even caretakers as well. This second of the two is among “collateral damage” described in the last and prior chapters.

On the subject and importance of grandparents, Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee write in *Second Chances*:

Grandparents can play a particular role, especially if their marriages are intact: symbolic generational continuity and living proof to children that relationships can be lasting, reliable and dependable. Grandparents also convey a sense of tradition and a special commitment to the young that extends beyond and over the parents' heads. Their encouragement, friendship and affection has special meaning for children of divorce; it specifically counteracts the children's sense that all relationships are unhappy and transient. (111)

In my own experience, these folks (of a bygone era of parenting) cannot generally comprehend the conduct that occurs in the courts today; they cannot conceive the sanctioning of purposeful destruction on the premise of personal rights and wants—rather than the sustaining of families on the proof of sacrifice and responsibility.

Many of these folks grew-up in an era when commitment and promises meant something—as did marriage and family. Individuals who defied such customs and rites were punished (rather than promoted) in their cause—if not by the family, than by the community and greater good. I'm certain that their “era” had its injustices and shortcomings but, in the collective, represented a much more viable and valued period for marriage and family.

The appraisal of the product (of no-fault divorce) as “the greatest social crisis” is not my doing; it is the determination of those who have researched and reported at much greater depth and acumen. For the rest of us, and particularly those who are casualties of the war, the “crisis” is very real and personal. For the

balance of society however, a distorted view remains—and the *special interests* are busy ensuring status quo. As long as they are able to dupe the greater society—or until society is enlightened to the facts—fathers and family continue moving toward endangerment, the fabric of our society continues to unravel, and the sacrifices and responsibility learned of parenting continues to be disregarded and devalued.

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Acknowledgments

I have purposely saved this page as the last item of the book. Of all the possibilities of this endeavor, any success is simply measured the attempt to love my children and the love that has been extended by others toward me...and my family.

To my family goes a great deal of appreciation for their support—their words, prayers, and much more. To those who are not family, yet in many ways seem so, I make the effort now to “suggest” some that come to mind on this evening.

First to Mike R. and Ron D.—two men in Atlanta that came to my side during the divorce...and whom I will never forget; another is Don P. —who came along...after my first jailing. One more is P. Murphy of *Circle of Champions*. Others could be mentioned; but let me simply name the organizations of which they are a part of: *Divorce Recovery* (St. Augustine); Ivy Creek Church (Lawrenceville); Christ Fellowship (Anniston); Cokesbury Methodist (Charleston); Jacksonville First Methodist (Jacksonville, AL); Christ Church (St. Augustine); Catholic Jail Ministry (St. Augustine); and, last but not least, Ken V. of Student Venture (Jacksonville, FL)

In this endeavor (to write a book), I must recognize Clair W. and Cindy C. for their inspiration... with some guidance. Others in the workflow include Sharp Bookbinding (Alexandria, AL) and the folks at Self-Publishing, the organization and *how-to* publication.

Finally, and most important, is to acknowledge my Lord. In the recent movie, *Amazing Grace* (the story of William Wilberforce and British abolition of slavery), a script by the character of John Newton; “I remember two things: I am great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.”

*My idea of
marriage was
largely
fostered by
what I*

About the Author

H. Kirk Rainer was born in Atlanta, Georgia, on June 16, 1961. Much of his adult life, and a few years of youth, was in Northeast Florida. At the present, and for the foreseeable future, he has made his home in Northeast Alabama.

Pictured at the lower-right is a proud moment: the birth of his youngest son – one of four natural children for which he has been richly blessed. Oh, the new arrival is Brian-Wesley – who was named after Kirk’s brother and John Wesley, Methodist founder-pastor and anti-slavery proponent in the 1,700’s.

At this time in his life, Kirk is busy in the general direction of writing; both in training and in practicing this new



found endeavor. At the same time, he continues to ply his skills and education as an engineer.

As a last item, one of the last family photos taken in 2000 somewhere atop Mount Cheaha at a place called Turnip Seed. The kids enjoyed the day with their grandparents and the week with their dad. It was a most memorable time: we could just sit back, and watch the day turn to darkness in the light of a fire and the warmth of a family.

