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NSPCC joins campaign against Shared Parenting

"Taking contact for granted undermines the principle that the welfare of the child must be paramount," said Mary Marsh, chief executive of the NSPCC. "The NSPCC believes that without thorough safety checks and an unambiguous message that the safety of the child comes first, these proposals will hinder efforts to ensure the welfare of the child is maintained."

She made the comments as amendments to the Children and Adoption Bill went before the House of Lords in early November. The amendments aimed to enshrine a presumption of shared parenting in law.

These were tabled by Conservative and Liberal Democrat peers, and for a while it looked as though the Government might suffer a defeat.

Unfortunately - from a FNF point of view - the Liberal Democrats lost their bottle, and the Government romped home safely.

Organisations such as the NSPCC were successful in suggesting that an "automatic presumption of contact" when parents split up would create danger for children. They repeated Women's Aid research that 29 children have been killed during contact visits to an estranged parent in the past decade.

FNF chair John Baker said, "Contact saves lives. In the same 10 year period, 800 children lost their lives while with their resident parents. There are good reasons to think that if you drive fathers out of the lives of the children, on the grounds that they are dangerous, the risks to the children will actually rise.



NSPCC chief exec Mary Marsh, right, celebrates the recent merger with fund strapped ChildLine. Esther Rantzen looks pleased too.

Why? More mothers will have more stress than they can cope with. They will not have the help and support that shared parenting can give them. Their children may have no-one to whom they can turn. And both mothers and children may be vulnerable to men who are riskier than the natural father ever was. Globally, natural fathers prevent more abuse than they inflict. Indeed, the NSPCC's own research shows this, and it's sad to see them joining the band-wagon that wants to raise the barriers to contact."

In 2000, the NSPCC published *Child Maltreatment in the United Kingdom**;

a study of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect. One section is titled *Stereotypes and Reality*. The study showed that the stereotype that "most physical abuse is carried out by men, especially fathers or stepfathers" is "Untrue."

"Violent" treatment was more likely to be meted out by mothers (49%) although fathers were responsible for 40%. The study also tends to confirm the hypothesis of other research that "those mothers who smack most frequently also tend to smack hardest."

Putting all sorts of parental abuse together they say "...mothers as well as fathers can be responsible for maltreatment." Indeed mothers were "...as likely, and in some instances more likely to inflict some form of harm than fathers."

"Two simple things are clear," added Baker. "First, that in all but a small minority of cases both parents are competent and loving of, and loved by, the children. Contact is safe. Secondly, the stereotypes promoted by those that seek to gender cleanse the family on the grounds of 'male danger' are false."

*Child Maltreatment in the United Kingdom. Cavson P., Wattam C., Brooker S., Kelly G., 2000. London NSPCC.

"It's sad to see the NSPCC joining the band-wagon that wants to raise the barriers to contact ... their own research show that the stereotypes promoted by those that seek to gender-cleanse the family on the grounds of 'male danger' are false." - John Baker, FNF chair

Paternity leave minister loses sexual discrimination suit.

Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt, in her previous job at the Department for Trade and Industry, chose a woman for a job at the ministry, even though the candidate trailed a poor third to a man. The man, Malcolm Hanney, used the Freedom of Information Act to see the interviewing panel's notes. Hewitt refused to apologise, so Hanney threatened to take the case to the High Court. Only at that point did Hewitt back down. Her department will have to pay his £18,000 costs.

Hewitt is author of *About Time - The Revolution in Work and Social Justice*. In a 1997 speech to Tony Blair's favourite think-tank, the IPPR, she said, "Remember the formal and informal sanctions which kept and sometimes keep women out of male dominated jobs ... think of the formal and informal barriers that men face."

Said Rod Liddle in *The Sunday Times*. "The incident was a clear breach of the Sex Discrimination Act. Once the DTI finally admitted as much, its feeble excuse was that Hewitt hadn't realised that she was breaking the law - even though the act was one she'd spent her life agitating for."

Enough said.

Former Master of the Rolls Lord Donaldson

experienced his own judgement day late in August. He was 84. His main contribution to the smooth-running of justice from a FNF point of view was the introduction of skeleton arguments in appeals, and the "handing down" of judgements to litigants and press, instead of having them read out. He also eliminated a back-log of 600 cases within six months by employing a barrister in the civil appeals office to assist with case management. Latterly, of course, the queues have built up again (a shortage of judges) and as anyone who knows the courts knows, case management is an on-going bad joke.

Working women are 29% more likely to divorce

than those who stay at home and raise children, says the *European Sociological Review* (11/7/2005). The probability of divorce is in direct correlation to the number of hours a woman worked. The researchers, from Vrije University in Amsterdam, based their findings on a database of more than 2,000 people, including 1,000 divorced women.

Men as Idiots

Ads for Jerry Hall's TV series *Kept* about "The Perfect Companion" were withdrawn from London Underground stations. They

showed her standing in evening dress with a group of half-naked men, on all fours, on dog leashes. The Advertising Standards Authority said it violated ASA rules about "portraying men, women or children as sex objects".

Commenting on another programme, *Bring Your Husband to Heel*, Evening Standard TV critic Victor Lewis-Smith said, "You can imagine the uproar if the format were inverted, and husbands were taught how to 'bring their wives to heel'. 'Man shares 85% identical DNA with dogs' is the scientific justification, although as humans we share 99.8% with chimps (and 30% with bananas, for that matter). It's an abjectly pisspooor premise."

The programmes follow many similar examples, such as the 2002 Carling Black Label ad where a housewife gets her husband to lick the house clean by spilling drops of the lager on the floor, a 1990s Lee jeans poster where a woman's stiletto rests on a bloke's bum and a Bud Lite campaign with the slogan, "I like men. I just hate their guts."

Meanwhile, Big Brother producers Endemol have a new series starting in Germany in which a lesbian appeals for sperm to inseminate herself with. Samples from a group of men are watched under a microscope, and he with the fastest sperm wins a Porsche and the title of most fertile man in Germany (though as any fule do kno, anyone with a Porsche usually also has a very short willy - and probably sluggish sperm).

Perhaps men have themselves to blame (you see it's catching, being a bloke, I'm blaming myself already). Opposite a recent double page *Guardian Family* feature starring F4J, FNF and Fathers Direct is a column called "Slack Dad" where some weedy, wimpy, empathetic new bloke complains he can't even peel mangoes for his kids.

Wife Chop

A new Channel 4 show, which offers cash to families willing to have their separation filmed, has been nicknamed Wife Chop and will go out next year. The show is advertised on *beonscreen.com*, which attracts thousands of people desperate to become a reality TV star. (*Daily Record*, 20/10/05)

5 million mothers and fathers have a "non-traditional" family life,

with 19% bringing up children on their own, says Mintel's Angela Hughes. 24% of adults in traditional families do not always agree with their partner on how to bring up their children. This rises to 31% in non-

traditional couples.

Almost half of parents aged 16-24 live in non-traditional families. In this group 51% of mothers are single parents, but only 1% (!) of fathers below 35 are single parents.

Among socio-economic group AB, 18% are in a non-trad family. In the E socio-economic group that rises to 70%. (*Metro*, 9/9/05)

Population Trends warns that, by 2031, 40% of men and 35% of women aged 45-55 will never have married. The percentage who are married will fall from 71% (2003) to 48% (2031) for men, and from 72% to 50% for women. The number of cohabiting couples is expected to rise from 2 million to 3.8 million. (*Observer*, 2/10/05)

32% of British Families Never Meet

says a poll published by MORI in September on behalf of the organisers of National Meetings Week (NMW) and the initiative's 'Let's Meet at Home' campaign. Over two thirds of all Brits do not meet to discuss family matters regularly (i.e. once a month or more often). According to the research, 15% meet between two and four times a year and 7% meet just once per year.

"A man who doesn't spend time with his family can't be a real man," said Don Corleone in *The Godfather*, by Mario Puzo.

Back with Dad after 5 Years

Laura Wilthew, 15, was reunited with her father after five years. "When my mum left my dad, she told me I wasn't allowed to see him ever again." But her mother abandoned her for a boyfriend she met on holiday in Turkey. Social workers tracked down her dad, George, for her, and she now lives with him and his new partner, Diane. "I had really bad butterflies because I hadn't spoken to him for five years. But as soon as I saw him he was so nice and so was Diane." He had always kept a photo of Laura in his wallet, and when he showed it to her, she says she burst into tears. (*Daily Telegraph*, 17/9/05).

Divorce rate rising

The number of divorces actually fell in England and Wales by 0.1% in 2004 to 153,490, but in Scotland there was an increase of 2.5% and in Northern Ireland by 8.5%, which put the overall figure for the UK up by 0.2% in 2004, compared to 2003.

The average age is also rising. For men it rose from 42.3 to 42.7, for women from 39.8 to 40.2. The average length of a marriage ending in divorce rose from 11.3 to 11.5 years. (*Office of National Statistics*).

Of course, these days around half of all couples cohabit rather than marry.

Every £1 you donate could bring FNF 28p more in tax relief! Yet we still have 803 members who have not completed Gift Aid declarations. Many of you must be tax-payers! On average, each declaration yields £20 to FNF. Just return the form you have been sent, or download one from the web-site, or call the office and do a Gift Aid declaration over the phone.
£20 x 803 = well, you do the maths. FNF needs that money.

FNF deserves serious money.

Each time that FNF has reviewed its priorities it puts social care work as its first priority.

It has put lobbying work as its second priority. Not for us, the climbing of cranes. Though you are tempted when new Children's Minister Maria Eagle postpones meeting with us for the third time.

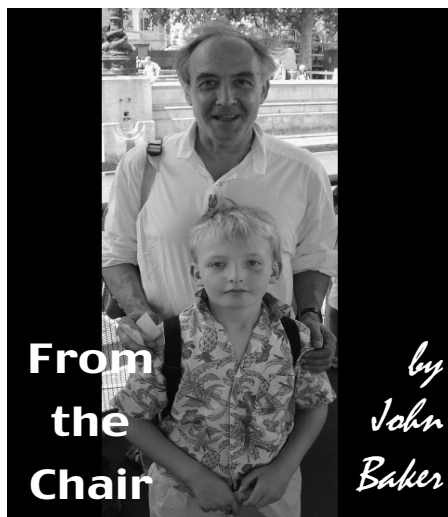
We are the only national provider of information and support to parents living apart from their children. No-one knows how many of us there are - but a fair estimate is 2.5 million. There are a whisker under 4 million children living apart from their parents. Many of them suffer a raft of problems that would be wholly avoidable if their 'other parent' was more involved in their lives. In poor performance at school, in physical and mental health, in getting into trouble, in underage pregnancy.

What support do the 2.5 million with the 4 million children get? The National Family and Parenting Institute estimate that about 1% of services for 'parents' are for fathers.

Staggering isn't it? Even the family courts cannot beat that for sex discrimination.

And how much of that 1% is for fathers in divided families? Most desk top calculators will not have enough space for all the noughts after the decimal point.

FNF's services come almost wholly from membership subscriptions and from small personal donations and unpaid



From
the
Chair

by
John
Baker

“about 1% of services for 'parents' are for fathers ... even the family courts can't beat that for discrimination”

voluntary effort. With that we provide information and help to more male parents than the flagship 'parenting support' agency funded by the state with several million pounds.

We help a higher proportion of women than they do men.

But we still reach only a minute proportion of those who need us.

Nowhere near 1% this time.

So come on, you people who decide government funding and who make charity trust decisions, isn't it time you paid attention to this need? As little as five years ago you gave zero to support the 'other parent'.

We are not asking for this money to support our lobbying - our members should pay for that aspect of our work. We want it to improve the care and support we provide for individuals. Help for parents to get a decent amount of parenting time with their children and to use it to the best effect for their children.

To the politicians we say we are not appealing to your sense of justice (we know better, you are politicians). We want to point out that funding us is actually in your own best interest. Socially, because helping us will reduce the social problems that cause you so much trouble.

And because if you do not deal with us - a highly responsible charity with very reasonable demands - you will find we are outflanked by organisations that are much harder to deal with.

If you find that more of you are subject, like Mrs Hodge, to being handcuffed by an angry man claiming he is making a 'citizens' arrest for 'child abuse' it will be because you have spurned law-abiding fathers making quite modest and reasonable demands.

Like enabling their children to have a decent amount of parenting time with both loved and loving parents.

It is staggering that this aim is not properly recognised.

Judge Judy backs a right to shared parenting

Before starring in her hit reality show Judge Judy, Judith Scheindlin, was a real-life family court judge in America. Below, an excerpt from an interview on CNN's influential Larry King Live.

Many presenters of similar shows, and many agony aunts, demonstrate themselves sympathetic to the plight of the father slung out of the life of his children. In the UK we have Trisha's Patricia Goddard, or Dierdre Sanders of The Sun and Zelda West-Meads of The Mail on Sunday who both refer many readers to FNF.

Larry King: I had a judge, who became a federal judge. He told me once that the hardest thing to decide was custody cases...

Judy Scheindlin: I've always thought in this country we do a terrible disservice to fathers. You know there was a time many years ago when we had what we called the Tender Years Doctrine, which meant children of tender years, young children, always went to their mother.

And then all of the courts in this country said that's not fair. We have to be equal. So, on the books there is a law that says no one parent is favored over the other, now that's honored more in the breach than it is honored in actuality. And I have been a proponent for many years of there being a presumption in this country for joint custody of children. That's where courts should start.

King: That's where you begin?

Scheindlin: That's where you begin and if you're going to deviate from that, you have to demonstrate by clear and convincing evidence that there is some valid reason why you're going to deviate from that because



one parent is crazy, one parent has a drug problem, an alcohol problem, something's wrong.

But that should be the standard joint custody because children are entitled to be raised by two parents even if the parents don't get along any more. I mean I think it's

horrendous when one parent picks up and moves out of the state or moves 250 miles.

No, no, no, no, no. You can't say to people who you've lulled into this sense of I'm equal, you're an equal father. You can take off paternity leave. We expect you to participate in the rearing of your children, to go to open school night, to be out there to play with them. Very often there are two people working in the household. They divide authority and you're equal except when there's a divorce.

And then, how often, Larry, I ask you the question, do you hear it quoted in the paper "He lost custody of his children"? You don't hear that. You hear "She lost custody. There must be something wrong with her."

Well I think that that has to change in this country because it was my experience in the family court, and I left the family court ten years ago, but even my experience on the television courtroom suggests to me that there are as wonderful a group of fathers out there as a group of mothers.

(The above is an edited transcript of Larry King Live, 4/10/05).

Breaking Court Secrecy: How to Handle the Media

It's always been a puzzle to FNF that the media hasn't been in the vanguard to get the secret family courts opened up to public scrutiny. They miss so many stories.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of publicising the workings of the family courts, many a brave FNF member over the years has decided to "go public" only to find that the paper, or broadcaster's lawyers, kill the story for fear of being in Contempt of Court.

Things are easing up. The media has given up with the pretence of "Child W". We all know that Blunkett's boy is called William. Appeal Court judgements often contain real names, a succession of senior judges, the latest being Judge Wall, have called for greater openness.

No better time to tell your story. So which media to go for? It goes without saying that local papers and radio are the easiest to get interested.

The Daily Mail is probably the most difficult; as the richest newspaper, they commission far more articles than they use, and they can be prodigious time wasters; you give up time and nervous energy, then they don't publish.

If a media outlet does this to you, feel no qualms about approaching someone else - they've wasted your time, you owe them nothing. But don't tell the new paper about the previous experience. Each media outlet likes to feel it has had the story first.

If journalist "scum" are only second in unpopularity to politicians, I would reassure FNF members contemplating telling their sorry tale that it is remarkably rare that you get stitched up. Stitch-ups generally occur when the journalist is working "undercover", as in the recent Granada *Tonight with Trevor McDonald* films about F4J.

Editorial



It is best not to say you are from FNF. Best to be the random man off the street, because the media hate to feel they've been leaned on by "pressure groups", even though few journalists are actually capable of finding their own stories; they are dependent on charities and pressure groups and people flogging books or films. FNF gets asked for a lot of case studies.

It's that dependency which is your insurance against a stitch-up. Often they get things wrong, but it's rarely malice; just incompetence. Or hurry; it's tough turning round a story accurately within a few hours to hit a deadline.

During the interview, of course, we are delighted if you plug FNF's usefulness as much as you can. It's how people hear of us, and how we get members. A large membership is our independence.

When approaching a news organisation, best to ring the "news desk", if it's a topical story, or the "features desk" if it's a tale that is not tied to any particular news. If you know a particular journalist has covered a similar story before, you may be half-way there, though they have low boredom thresholds, and if they get too many calls or emails on one subject, they glaze over.

What has been a life-changing event for you is just another story for them.

A news "peg" helps.

For example, the perfect time to interest a journalist in the fact that you, a man, have been beaten up by your wife, would have been during and shortly after the Rebekah Wade/Ross Kemp story. Pegs only last a couple of days, so you have to be quick. That story broke on Thursday. On Sunday and Monday there were a few follow up features, and that was it. What with the weekend, Friday was the only day you could have got a story in.

No point calling a newspaper at 4 pm. The contents of tomorrow's paper have more or less been settled. FNF's Rebekah Wade press release went out at 4.30, too late, though there was a chance a quote might have been picked up on, and in fact the points we made did appear in "think pieces" over the next week.

All media prefer real names and photographs, but they also understand that, where children are involved, anonymity may need to be protected. You might want that too, and you can insist on it, but beware that anonymity might make them lose interest in the story. *The Daily Mail* especially likes nice clean-cut middle-class-looking people to photograph and if there aren't any, well, end of story.

If you are in an official position with FNF, it's a different matter; you are fair game and should always be careful how your words might be spun in an article. "All publicity is good publicity" isn't completely true. In my position as FNF spokesman I recently offended ... no, best let's not go there again. After a flurry of emails the difficulty has been patched up.

One day, though, I fear I will come out with a bout of spokesman's Tourette's. I sometimes wake up in a cold sweat having, in my dreams, just told some sour old man-hating bag of a Polly Toynbee to bog off.

Except the epithet was a lot worse than "bog". And the scenario unlikely. It's been a long time since Polly last called me, though she used to.

Cafcass News

Harry Fletcher, the Assistant General Secretary of NAPO (The National Association of Probation Officers - the union to which many Cafcass officers belong), says in *NAPO News*, "Fathers 4 Justice are still campaigning for automatic co-parenting, a notion which will not be supported by either Napo, Cafcass, or the Government."

In no way does FNF speak for F4J, of course; but *McKenzie* observes that it is a near infallible marker of an anti-shared parenter, when an official, politician, or lawyer claims that "fathers' rights" campaigners are demanding "automatic" co-parenting (see the front page, and the NSPCC).

50:50 works very well, but no one, not even F4J, argues it will work in every case, or even most.

"Little has changed" at Cafcass

alleges *Private Eye*, (16/9/05). There is managerial chaos and staff are disgruntled. There is a £4 million deficit, and a back-log of around 1,000 children who have not had a Cafcass officer allocated. A letter from Anthony Douglas to Children's Minister Angela Eagle says that already over-worked staff will be worked even harder, and, to save money, vacancies will not be filled, and there will have to be a lower pay settlement for staff. Also time spent on cases will be reduced.

In a press release, Association of Lawyers for Children (ALC) spokesman Barbara Hopkin warns that "Court proceedings are going ahead without the guardians present." The wait for a guardian in public law cases, such as custody battles between parents and councils, has fallen from up to three months to up to two

months in London, further reductions would not be possible if Cafcass went ahead with plans to make guardians responsible for resolving private law cases, such as divorce proceedings.

Ms Hopkins said that given the shortage of guardians, the target in the Government's policy document *Every Day Matters* for all public and private law cases to be allocated within two days by April 2007 was unrealistic.

Cafcass boss Anthony Douglas said, "At present the London region has only one case in public law in which a guardian is yet to be allocated within the 28 days set out in our key targets, and on average the timeframe is well within two to three weeks. In our private law work we have seen a reduction in cases unallocated from 9.8% on average last year to 2.6% on average this year to date."

THE HIDDEN SABOTEUR - Testosterone

by Nick O'Hara Smith

You realise it is hopeless. The courts have sided with your ex and granted her residence of the kid(s), with no contact for you. Mostly this is due to your lethargy, mood swings, temper outbursts, depression, even violence. Your GP considers you depressed and has prescribed medication. The court has recommended anger management, counselling, perhaps leading to supervised visits, down the road.

But is depression the problem? Sometimes there is a physical reason.

Testosterone level problems tend to be misunderstood and misdiagnosed. So misunderstood is it, that drug companies reckon only 5% of the target market is being treated.

A healthy man needs a healthy supply of testosterone. It is the most important hormone in his body, comparable to oestrogen in women. In both cases, a surplus, or deficit, of our main hormone results in ill health.

Men have small amounts of oestrogen, as women have testosterone, and both remain important to overall health in their minor roles.

Men are told our testosterone declines naturally from the age of about thirty. The decline is said to be gradual, with symptoms vague and non-specific, meaning they could be caused by anything.

In truth, testosterone can be lower than a healthy level, due to a variety of reasons, much earlier than that.

Genetics, ill health, serious injuries, exposure to certain chemicals, medicinal and recreational drugs, tobacco and excess alcohol, can all do permanent damage to our testosterone supply.

Brain function, spatial awareness, learning abilities and physical attributes can all be affected adversely.

Exercise, good diet and a healthy lifestyle are always an advantage to health, though they're not always enough to prevent testosterone problems.

Lethargy, low energy levels, mood swings, depression and low libido all affect our quality of life and sense of well-being. Any one, or any combination, of those symptoms is likely to draw criticism from a partner and perhaps be cited in divorce proceedings, cloaked in legal speak. All of these symptoms could be attributable to Low Testosterone. Yet when you get tested by a doctor, he tells you your testosterone level is normal.

Why are we so helpless if we have symptoms of a testosterone problem, but the doctor says the test is normal?

The answer lies in the testing method and referral threshold set by the Society of Endocrinologists, which guides NHS policy.

There are various methods of testing testosterone in the body. The one used in the NHS measures solely the production of testosterone from the testicles.

The "referral to consultant" threshold is set at the lowest end of the large laboratory range, which itself, is normally set from a sampling of the local population.

This method of testing has been shown to be unreliable by the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists (AACE) in their urgent request for attention to Testosterone Deficiency in December 2002. They insist at least three tests are required in order to make proper preliminary diagnosis.

The AACE say two further tests, known as "LH" and "FHS" are needed to establish whether testosterone production is enough, too much, or too little for the body's needs.

These additional two tests get carried out only once the patient is referred to a consultant. Often they confirm a diagnosis of low testosterone. Referral can come too late, in many instances, to repair the damage done to a relationship with wife and children by mood shifts.

Using these additional tests would catch disorders earlier, or point to another problem.

So how big is the problem? Since 2002, five

new products have been launched on the European market. Some market analysts suggest 5 million men and 5 million women remain untreated in the pre 2005 EU. That implies 2 million men and women in the UK.

This is a female problem too; for women, the loss of testosterone production is usually because of the menopause, or earlier ovarian problems. They are less fortunate than men, because there is no adequate therapy for them that includes the tiny, but still important, testosterone they have lost.

There is injustice out there in regard to testosterone problems. Those who suffer from it untreated, do nothing but lose, until they lose, everything. It may not be the only answer to the problems being experienced, but it should not be ignored, as it tends to be now.

If reading this article makes you think you may have a problem, if you are a man, at least, you probably can get it treated.

The Testosterone Deficiency Center - www.androids.org.uk
The Testicular Cancer Resource Center - www.tcrcc.acor.org

References:

1. The American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists Adult Male Hypogonadism Guidelines at : www.aace.com/clin/guidelines/hypogonadism.pdf
2. The Society of Endocrinology statement on Testosterone at: www.endocrinology.org/sfe/testosterone.htm
3. The Testosterone Deficiency Centre website and bibliography at: www.androids.org.uk/

Testosterone levels are lower in husbands and fathers than in single men, who have twice as much, according to research from Northumbria University.

Evolutionary psychologist Dr. Nick Neave said, "When you have a baby, you don't want the father casting his eye elsewhere. Having two parents has great benefits. This could be nature's way of calming men down and

making them more civilised when children are about."

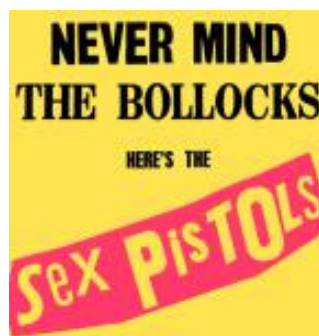
In the mornings, married fathers produce 33% less testosterone than married non-fathers, and 44% less than single men. (*The Daily Mail*, 9/11/2005).

"**Bollocks,**" says FNF member Phil, who is responsible for drawing the problem of low testosterone to

the attention of McKenzie.

"I myself lost my children's home and have been in court since because I wasn't treated for low testosterone after cancer. Since I have been on Hormone Replacement Therapy, I have been fantastic.

"You will find that high testosterone makes a man more level-headed, less aggressive, while low testosterone will make a man more aggressive and depressed and thus likely to lose his family."





The Good Granny Guide by Jane Fearnley-Whittingstall, Short Books (£xx.xx)

Reviewed by Andrew Casey

This is an excellent handbook for grandparents. It is written in a very engaging, funny way, but conveys its message memorably. It is mostly focused on grandmothers, but does include grandfathers! The illustrations by Alex Fox are very good and relevant.

It covers everything: getting to know your new grandchild, the changed dynamics of the relationships between grandparents and parents, activities to keep grand-children entertained, and "Big Issues", i.e. food, bedtime and discipline. Parenting styles vary widely between individuals and generations. What was acceptable in 1950 might not be accepted now, e.g. slapping children.

It has 2 chapters about what grandparents can do when they help, e.g. when children or parents are sick, when a family member dies, or when the parents separate. A grandparent might be the child's only refuge and confidante when parents divorce.

The appendices are useful, with childhood songs and rhymes and favourite books.

The book asserts that grandparents are an essential part of modern family life, and that includes step-grand-children and step-grandparents. They can help their children to be better parents, and help their grandchildren to mature into civilised, happy adults with joyful memories of their childhood.

A balance must be struck between the demands of the parents and the needs and resources of grandparents. For example, a mother going out to a job soon after the birth might want her mother to mind the children every day, and the grandmother might not be able to do that. The health, wealth and personal circumstances of the grandparents and the parents must be taken into account. If everybody is sensible, practical, tactful and sensitive, arrangements can be made which suit everybody. Nobody wants a situation where, e.g. the mother and the mother-in-law openly hate each other and the grandchildren lose contact with one set of grandparents. Nobody wants to feel obliged to do more than he or she feels comfortable doing.

Grandparents are vital to a modern family, and it is tragic to see how many children are denied the benefits of contact with grandparents, cousins and other relatives because of family breakdown.

Grandparents are often the first to lose out when the parents' relationship



He's Having a Baby

(Dorling Kindersley - £12.99) is a new guide to fatherhood by Fathers Direct's Jack O'Sullivan.

Its publication was tied in with the BBC TV series of the same name. The section on teenagers is written by David Thomas, former editor of *Punch* and one of the leading writers on men's issues of the last two decades (he's even written for *McKenzie* - No. 56).

Says O'Sullivan, "There isn't really a sense of community for fathers, like there is for mothers. I see fatherhood as a subculture that still needs to be endorsed by mainstream society in the way that motherhood is... There's a lot of finger-wagging at fathers, with exhortations for them to be more involved with their children, yet society does not always make this easy for them. The culture at work is still sending out messages to dads to leave their fatherhood at home. The take-up of statutory paternity leave is only 20% because it is not paid at a high enough level for most men to afford to take it."

The book is full of real-life stories and practical information and tips for activities. It takes a hands-on approach and draws on research from over 700 academic sources on how involved dads can make a big difference to a child's educational achievement, mental health, risks of criminality and opportunities for long-term happiness.

Examples of the kind of questions addressed include:

Are dads instinctively good with babies?

- Within hours of the birth, dads can recognise their babies blindfolded, by the touch and shape of their hands. They are just as sensitive when feeding them. Babies take just as much milk from dad as from mum. Both mum and dad react similarly to a crying baby. A dad's testosterone crashes by up to a third around the birth.

How do you save your baby's life? - The book digests for dads vital life-saving information on what to do if your baby is choking, fitting, bleeding heavily, suffering

collapses, especially if they have been used to plenty of contact with their grandchildren beforehand.

Grandparents will always be needed, and this book is a very useful place to start preparing to be a grandparent.



a severe allergic reaction or is unconscious.

What does a dad need to know about drugs? - Dads who've led sheltered lives are shown all the highs and lows of ecstasy, cocaine and heroin, so he is up to speed with what his teenager may be offered.

Why do dads matter? - Because the children of involved dads typically do better at school, have better mental health when older, commit less crime and find it easier to make life-long relationships.

The Which? Guide to Divorce

8th edition, (£11.99) by Imogen Clout,

aims to help couples minimise the "crippling" costs of divorce to free up as much money as possible for the family. Clout said, "It's not a DIY divorce book. That's not something it recommends at all".

Previous editions of the Which? guide have been written by lawyers (Clout is a journalist) and have failed to tell the litigant what he or she really needs to know, the kind of information you pick up at a FNF meeting (or, for that matter, in a Women's Aid refuge).

If this book is useful, or if it's crap (earlier editions were), *McKenzie* would like to know. Reviews please.

Fathers Feel Too, by Andrew Don, (£7.99, published by the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society. Order from support@uk-sands.org.) The book looks at Don's experience of a still born baby, and of supporting his wife through the trauma.

No One Takes My Children

by Donya al-Nahi (Mainstream, £15.99) is about one woman's efforts to help British women get their children back after they've been abducted abroad, generally to Muslim countries. British born, and a convert to Islam, she has conducted 20 daring rescue missions in places such as Jordan, Lebanon, Iran and Dubai. In only three cases was she unsuccessful.

While she went on these dangerous missions, her own Iraqi husband Mahmoud looked after the children in London.

But then he snatched the children to that war-torn country. She got these children back too. An interview by Jessica Davies in *The Times* says "To her credit, her children still adore their father. Pictures of him are all over the flat." Davies, as befits a journalist who used to step out with the *McKenzie* editor himself a decade or so ago, when he was in the thick of his own troubles, got the father's side of the story.

"Everything got on top of me," said Mahmoud, "the invasion of Iraq, worrying about my family, I hadn't seen them for 23 years. I regretted taking the children the moment I'd done it. I'm not that kind of character. I completely lost the plot."

Donya herself abducted her child Marlon by her first marriage. "I haven't got a good excuse. I was terribly young and I've always felt sorry for leaving like that. The dad and I are still friends, and he's in contact with Marlon."

Perhaps what Donya's tangled story shows is that however badly two parents act towards each other - and abducting the children is one of the worst things you can do to the other parent - it is possible to achieve a kind of reconciliation later on.

The book is to be made into a film.

The Future of Men by *Marian Salzman*, a leading futurologist for ad agency JWT, says "All too often we're portraying man as the victim - of his sexual neediness, his over-inflated ego or his sheer ineptitude.

"Whereas men still need women, their traditional source of comfort and inspiration, women are increasingly less likely to feel the same about men. And that's changing everything about the rules of the game."

Salzman was one of the first to use the expression "metrosexual". Now she talks of the "Ubersexual", - a man who is supremely confident, masculine, stylish, and committed to uncompromising quality in all areas of life.

Whatever.

Until I Find You by *John Irvine*, *Bloomsbury*, 842 pages. The newest novel by *The World According to Garp* author has had very poor reviews says *The Irish Independent*. It's about a mother and four year old's quest to find the child's father.

"None of the characters, from a ridiculously precocious Jack, to his tattoo artist/prostitute mother and ne'er-do-well father ever actually seem real..." says the reviewer. "In his defence, Irving has admitted he was inspired by his own father deserting him. But the book is so long, repetitive and boring that most people simply won't care."

Oh well.

McKenzie is always willing to print short reviews or recommendations of books and films that would be of interest to FNF members or their children. Send 'em in.

Have you considered Life Membership of FNF? It costs £500, and is a great way to support the Charity, especially if you Gift Aid it; the tax you would have paid on that £500 goes to FNF instead, so FNF receives £640.

"Only one man in a thousand is a leader of men. The other 999 follow women."

Groucho Marx

"When a man opens the car door for his wife, it's either a new car, or a new wife."

The Duke of Edinburgh

(who, one guesses, may never have opened the car door for his wife...)

"Money - the one thing that keeps us in touch with our children."

Gyles Brandreth

"And now a sketch featuring Ronnie Corbett, whose wife thinks he's the salt of the earth. That's why she keeps him in the cellar."

Ronnie Barker, RIP

"The idea that the family suffers is, I believe, quite mistaken. To carry on with a career stimulates the mind, provides a refreshing contact with the outside world and so means that a wife can be a much better companion at home."

Margaret Thatcher

radical feminist, speaking in 1953

"We are lucky to be living in times where equal parenting is accepted as something desirable, even the norm. Good and eager fathers are more plentiful than ever in history and perhaps society needs to acknowledge this more than it does."

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown

"I have been a single mother once and I am sure every single mother in the world would agree with me - it sucks."

Liz Hurley

though not too bad if the dad's a billionaire

"My father told me that it takes as much effort, if not more, to be a bad person as it does to be a good person. So you might as well do the right thing because you'll end up saving energy."

John C Reilly

character actor (in *Chicago*, *The Aviator*, *The Hours*, *Magnolia*, *Boogie Nights*)

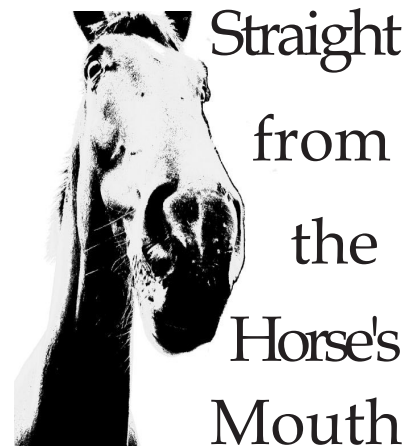
Fathering is as instinctive as mothering. Happily, we live in a country that is coming to terms with this.

Cristina Odone

(*The Observer*, 23/10/05)

"I believe strongly in the rights of women. I believe the day will come when women drive. The issue will require patience."

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia



"There is no dispute among those in the know that the present system is cumbersome, with delays acting against fathers, who are, in many cases arbitrarily denied contact for months on end. Court welfare officers are frequently inexperienced and have often been found to be biased in their reports."

Vanessa Lloyd-Platt

"society" solicitor

"There's no need for business to get its knickers in a twist: we're talking about a benefit that will affect 30-36,000 men at most"

Jack O'Sullivan

of Fathers Direct on the proposed extension of paternity leave

"I know what it is like not to have a father around. I think boys and girls need a male, as well as a female, reference point in the home to get their bearings on life."

Michael Buerk

Presenter of Radio 4's *Moral Maze*

"Much of the gender revolution may have been long overdue and may be good for all of us. But if it squeezes fathers out of families it will have consequences we will all live to regret!"

ibid.

"I am the result of my past, screwed up by it. Who indeed wouldn't be by having to choose between their mother and father at the age of less than seven?"

John Simpson

veteran BBC war correspondent and liberator of Kabul. He chose his father, but wishes he'd kept both parents.

Can't see your kids?

How about "adopting" a child in Africa, Asia or South America? You pay 50 pence per week by standing order. In exchange you get a regular update on the child's progress, and thank you cards and letters.

Which is more than you'll get from many "contact" orders of the kind that Napo's Harry Fletcher is so proud.

Action Aid does a good programme, but there are plenty more charities with good schemes.

www.actionaid.org.uk

House Keeping



"And When Did You Last See Your Father?"

The FNF Christmas card is produced by FNF North-West. It shows a painting called "And When Did You Last See Your Father?" The scene is from the Civil War (1642-1649), but is a Victorian painting by William Frederick Yeames. It shows Parliamentarian soldiers questioning the little boy about his Royalist father.

Cheques to "FNF Southport and North-West", PA Howarth, 10 Acorn Close, Leyland, PR25 3AF. £6 for 10 cards and envelopes. FNF logo ties also available, £15. Add £3 P&P per order.

phil.howarth@uuplc.co.uk tel: 01925 537434

FNF AGM notice

The Annual General Meeting of Families Need Fathers will be held on Saturday, 21st January 2006 from 1:30pm at The Jubilee Library, Jubilee Street, Brighton BN1 1GE.

Please see www.fnf.org.uk/members for more detailed notices with conditions, including dates, for standing in trustees elections, and how to nominate and propose candidates.

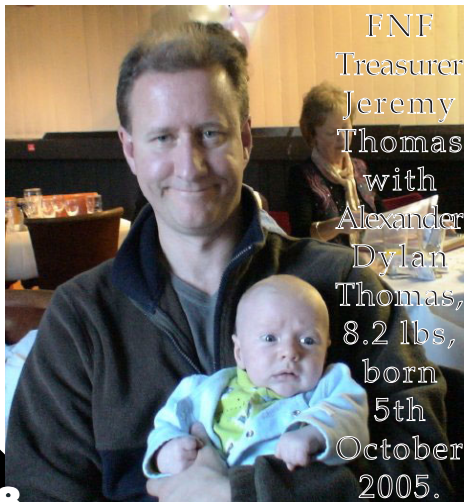
Full details will be available via the website from 30th December 2005.

Grant News

Thanks to David Chapple and his daughter who raised a substantial sum for FNF doing a sponsored cycle ride in the Summer.

Applications

FNF national has applied for two substantial grants under the DfES's Children, Young People and Families Grants funding programme, which includes a strand to fund "Work to engage fathers". It is hoped to



remove some of the burden of management of FNF from unpaid trustees - who don't always have time - to professional managers.

Grants received

FNF Trustee Charles Kenyon received a cheque for £1,150 donated to Families Need Fathers from Dudley Ramsden, Executive Chairman of Nisa Today's (Holdings) Ltd based in Scunthorpe. FNF was a welcome beneficiary, along with a number of medical charities, of the annual Nisa Today's Charity Golf Match near Grimsby, attended by many local companies. Accepting, Charles told the 140 or so businessmen about the work of FNF and also paid tribute to Dudley Ramsden and Nisa Today's as the first corporate donor to FNF - the first of many, we expect.

Luke Norman of **FNF Burton-on-Trent** applied for £870.93 from East Staffordshire Borough Council's Community Development Capital Fund to purchase computer equipment and associated software. He was turned down, because "the Panel decided not to approve the application primarily because they did not feel that this fulfilled the conditions to build full community spirit."

London Branch meetings have changed.

Please keep an eye out for possible further changes as London Central, North, Kent and possibly others rearrange their times so as not to clash.

London Central meetings are now every Tuesday at The Clockhouse, 82 Leather Lane (North End) EC1N 7TR. www.fnf-london.org.uk. Nearest tube Chancery Lane. 8 pm.

North London Branch is now also on 2nd/4th Tuesday. Winter's, 168 Ballards Lane, (North Finchley), N3 2PA. 8 pm.

FNF Wirral has accepted an invitation from Merseyside Mediation Services to share their offices at 88 Rodney Street, next to the Anglican Cathedral. MMS is funded by the Legal Aid Commission, and we are in there with them. FNF's North West profile should rise considerably after this move. It is hoped to run courses from the offices and that **FNF Southport** will come on board at some stage. Starting in the new year, meetings will alternate between Birkenhead and Liverpool.

FNF Parenting Support Workshops

You may have read about the new support service currently being developed by FNF. Since July we've run four Building memories of Dad workshops (see fnf.org.uk) in London, West Harrow and Crawley. There will be more early in the New Year, in North London, the Wirral, Bristol and Surrey. We're looking for more locations and venues for March onwards. All ideas most welcome.

The workshops are run by FNF members, for FNF members.

They are not about 'training' anyone to be a 'good' parent...

They are about supporting YOU and your family, giving time and space to share thoughts and ideas, and to learn from others in a similar parenting situation.

This is what some previous attendees had to say:

While the bid was being processed, writes Luke, the Council made a press announcement asking for groups to come forward as there was a lot of money still left to be awarded. Our submission was made following a press article on the award of a £1,000 grant to a woman who had set up a group for teenage mothers. Our bid was also run past a Funding advisor who stated he saw no reason why we should not get the award.

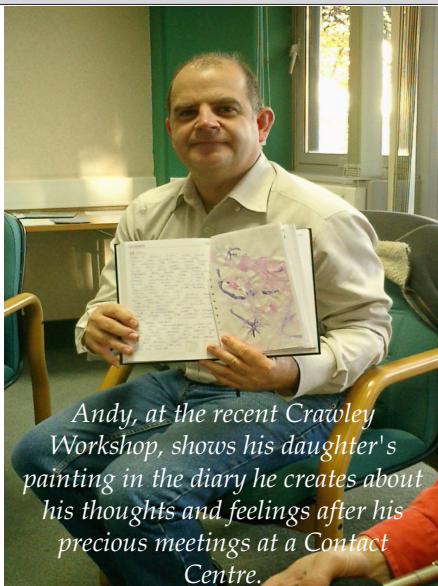
Good luck to other branches with their local applications.

As well as congratulations to **Odile and Jeremy Thomas** on the safe arrival of Alexander, thanks to Jeremy for raising £250 from work colleagues. The money was from his employer HBOS, who have a scheme for matching funds raised by charities. The London Branch raised £250 on the FNF Fathers Day boat trip.

Many employers have similar schemes for encouraging volunteering activity. Try yours.

FNF has reserved some places in the **British 10 km London Run** on 2nd July 2006. Let the office know if you, and perhaps your children, want to take part.

The Parenting Page



Andy, at the recent Crawley Workshop, shows his daughter's painting in the diary he creates about his thoughts and feelings after his precious meetings at a Contact Centre.

"Extremely useful both from a practical and emotional perspective. Quite a humbling experience"
"Revalidated myself"
"Exceeded my expectations, especially being able to share with others"
"Brought more positive emotions for myself, a bit more light at the end of the tunnel"
"Even though I see my kids a lot, it's still important how they see you. Every father should do this,

and every mother too".
"This is the best part of FNF. Relationships need work".

Give it a go...it really helps and is a good opportunity to meet up with others....and we always have a few laughs!

Workshops usually run on Saturdays from approx. 10 am to 4.30 pm. Places are free for FNF members (£30 for non-members).

For more information or to register your interest in a workshop near you, please contact either myself or the FNF Office.
All best wishes, and hope to meet some of you soon.

Sue Secker, FNF Support Service Development
01604 770785
sue.secker@fnf.org.uk

Why you should get your children angry

To help your kids manage stress, teach them healthy and fun ways to express their anger and let it all out:

* Sit them down with numerous sheets of plain white paper and some crayons or paint and encourage them to draw mad pictures... the more extreme and fanciful the better. Big monsters eating buildings, flying cars... this will let them express their feelings in an abstract way.

* Get the play-doh out and let them smash it around and punch it into flat shapes. Physical exertion is a great way to release pent-up frustrations.

* Get them interested in musical instruments. Music soothes the savage beast even children.

* Get out the box of toys and let them act out the anger they feel with dolls or puppets. It might involve a bit of bashing, but mentally they will have settled scores and will feel able to move

on without harbouring resentment.

Small kids can find it hard to express notions like anger or unfairness. They need plenty of time during the day to let their minds run riot (literally) and to vent frustration in unstructured, random ways. Give them time where they can escape into their own world and right wrongs.

(Source: *The Shortcut Bulletin* email newsletter)

Don't be afraid to let the kids get bored

says the Institute of Education, London University. It helps spur a child's imagination. "Children, like adults, need time to relax, explore ideas and be creative," said Professor Sue Hallam. (*Daily Mirror*, 19/9/05).

This is an argument for shared parenting; when a child only visits dad at the weekend, often he will arrive over-excited, and the return to mum will be a let-down. Normal parenting

involves letting the child get bored from time to time. As a weekend dad, you often find yourself in the role of children's entertainer, but that's not healthy.

If the children sometimes get bored with you, mum will feel less threatened by their love for you. Good for mums, good for dads, good for the children.

Step-parenting

www.saafamilies.org is the website of the Step-family Association of America. There has been no dedicated parallel organisation in the UK, since the Stepfamily Association hit pay-dirt and expanded to reach all parents as Parentline Plus.

Parentline Plus has a few downloadable leaflets on step-parenting dating from their previous existence, but nothing much seems to have been added on the subject since.

Many FNF members have to handle step-relationships: setting boundaries, dealing with jealousies and so on can be a challenge. One of the most frequent of FAQs we get at FNF is, "The new bloke is trying to get the children to call him 'Dad'. How do I stop that?"

The *saafamilies* site is useful for seeking ways of tackle such questions, and there is no discernible bias towards the custodial parent.

Here's an excerpt:

"Where do I belong?" and "Where do I fit in?" are questions asked by many stepchildren. Children have the ability to adjust to two sets of rules or two ways of doing things as long as they are not asked to choose which is better. Once the adults are clear about the rules, they need to be communicated to the children in the family by the biological parent.

Authorities recommend that at the beginning, discipline comes from the biological parent. This means that parent and step-parent decide on the rules together but that the biological parent announces the rules and enforces the consequences. Later, after relationships have developed, the step-parent can become more involved.

Adults also need to understand that there is a difference between "parenting" and "discipline."

Parenting has to do with things such as

- nurturing ("I love you")
- transmitting values ("It's important to do the best you can")
- giving positive strokes ("You really did a good job")
- maintaining appropriate boundaries in the family ("Your mother and I are talking now about a grown up decision")
- and setting appropriate limits on children's behavior ("You can play after the dishes are done").

Discipline has to do with enforcing consequences when values, boundaries and limits are not observed.

Flexibility on the part of the adults in one household can help to establish a "parenting partnership" with the other household. If this can happen, adults and children benefit. Often this parenting partnership cannot be established until feelings about the divorce and remarriage have settled down, but it is a goal worth working toward.

Toddlers Need Mothers

When the National Childminding Association's president, Dr Penelope Leach, published research in October saying that toddlers who are looked after by their mothers do significantly better in developmental tests than those cared for by nurseries, childminders or relatives, it caused huge press comment.

The interesting thing about this research was not the findings - babies and toddlers need mums, everyone knows that - but the reaction. Nearly every piece of media coverage emphasised the sexist nature of apparently making no inquiries about the value of fathers whatsoever.

This is new.

Even three years ago, no columnist or commentator would have noticed the absence of fathers from this study.

Our campaigns to reinforce the value of fatherhood, of two parents, are slowly working.



With major CSA reforms

looming, perhaps to be announced in December, *The Daily Mirror* (7/11/05) claimed a scoop, when it said that CSA defaulting dads could be tagged, be made to give up passports, to do labour in public, curfewed, or barred from being a company director.

No other paper has carried the story. If true it would seem to be a monstrous double standard in that the idea of tagging contact order breaking parents was rejected.

At Prime Minister's Question time on 16th November, Tony Blair admitted to Charles Kennedy that the CSA was a mess.

The minister for the CSA was, until his resignation, David Blunkett. He branded the current system "a complete shambles".

At the moment the CSA can only deduct payments from wages or benefits. There are no fines, no criminal-type punishments and unlimited time to give the agency information about pay and employees.

Back in September, influential former social security minister Frank Field, who famously "Thought the unthinkable" for a short time early in Labour's first term, said the CSA was in "melt-down".

The total backlog of parents waiting for a maintenance assessment continues to rise - up by 20% in the last six months, the latest date for which data is available. Worse still, 40% of all applications for child support on the new scheme are still waiting for an assessment to be made.

In October it was revealed that one in three phone calls to the CSA goes unanswered, meaning more than a million desperate parents cannot get through to its hotline.

Mothers hate the CSA as much as fathers.

Before resigning Blunkett announced the introduction of a mediation stage before resident parents filed formal claims to the CSA demanding enforced maintenance payments. He said to irresponsible fathers, "We are going to get really tough with you, we are going to take measures that will ensure that in the end you not only pay what is due but you pay more, and therefore if you want to sit down and work it out before you get into the system, let's do it now." The scheme will be piloted to see the level of take-up.

The latest measures will go before new Work & Pensions Secretary John Hutton. A full reform of the CSA is to be announced after a report from its new chief executive, Stephen Geraghty.

Family Law (Scotland) Bill

Here is something you can do to help fathers in Scotland, but it needs to be done very soon, writes FNF vice-chair, *Martin Crapper*.

The Executive has proposed an amendment to the Family Law Bill currently before the Scottish Parliament which would require the courts to consider allegations of domestic violence. This is as a result of campaigning by Scottish Women's Aid, the domestic violence charity. In itself this makes little difference to fathers because courts are already very quick to consider such allegations.

It does however create a useful precedent that the "welfare principle" - the statement in the Children Act that the "welfare of the child must be paramount" is being amplified and explained, by saying that domestic violence is specifically one of the issues that must be considered in determining the welfare.

If the welfare principle can be amplified in this way it can be in other ways too: notably by saying that both parents are equal, that a child has a right to a continuing relationship with both parents after separation or divorce and that court orders are made for the welfare of the child and that welfare therefore requires orders to be enforced if they are not being adhered to.

Please visit your MSP or at very least write to them making these points - and do so soon. Stage 2 of the Family Law Bill is supposed to be complete by 30th November.

For further information contact Martin.Crapper@fnf.org.uk

The CSA minister, David Blunkett finally resigned over the ownership of shares in the company DNA Bioscience. Blunkett has spoken many times of the strong attachment he feels for his son William by Mrs Kimberley Quinn, and it was clear too that he thought he might be father of Quinn's second baby - hence an interest in paternity testing.

During his fall it was the sleaze factor, rather than the paternity aspect of the story, which excited the papers. "The only reason why we are even aware of William's paternity, let alone watching plays in which it features," fulminated Melanie McDonagh in the *Evening Standard*, "is that Mr Blunkett insisted in a court action that he be recognised as William's father. If he'd done the decent thing and left the child alone to be raised by his mother and the man who thought he was William's father, her husband, Stephen Quinn, the matter would never have arisen."

Roll over dads. Your kids don't need you. Any old "male role model" will do.

Coincidentally "we need more male role models" was a favourite expression of Mr Blunkett's.

Sally Anderson, Blunkett's 29 year old blonde putative squeeze (though the colour of her hair may have interested him less than it interested the tabloids) claimed Mr Blunkett had told her "he made a number of important introductions for Tariq Siddiqi of DNA Biosciences which had greatly boosted the business".

Which invites the unworthy question, how many more love children does Blunkett have?

The Family Resolutions pilot project ended

in October. Intended to help 1,000 couples through their separation difficulties by using non court based resources like mediation, it only attracted 62 couples, 31 of whom came out the other side of the process with an agreement.

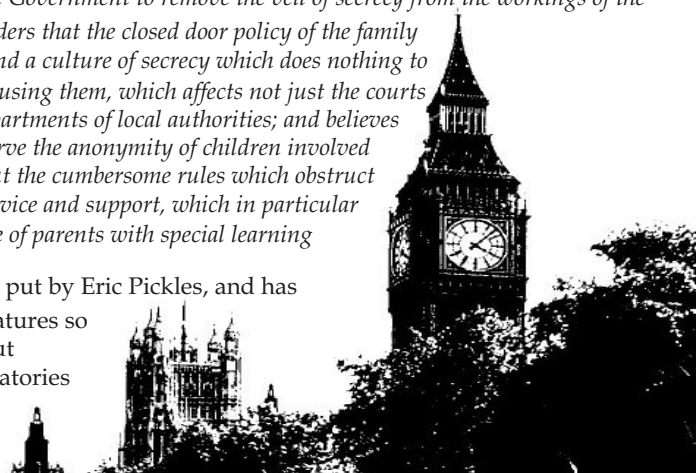
FNF would have liked the pilot to have succeeded in side-lining the adversarial court system, but always warned that, without making it compulsory, as with similar American schemes, it was likely to fail. (See McKenzie 67 for how one hard-nosed Californian scheme knocks sense into parents' heads, so that children keep both).

New Early Day Motion against court secrecy.

EDM No. 869 -The Workings of the Children Act 2004

That this House urges the Government to remove the veil of secrecy from the workings of the Children Act 2004; considers that the closed door policy of the family courts breeds suspicion and a culture of secrecy which does nothing to instil confidence in those using them, which affects not just the courts but the social services departments of local authorities; and believes that it is possible to preserve the anonymity of children involved in the proceedings without the cumbersome rules which obstruct parents from receiving advice and support, which in particular works to the disadvantage of parents with special learning difficulties.

The motion was put by Eric Pickles, and has attracted over 100 signatures so far. Pickles is a Tory, but prominent Labour signatories include Vera Baird QC, Andrew Dismore and Kate Hoey.



Domestic Violence is really, really funny; if a woman hits a man

The facts as they are "alleged": Neighbours hear *Sun* editor Rebekah Wade giving Ross Kemp a thick lip. She is arrested and held in Wandsworth nick for eight hours. No charges are made.

Later Wade jokes with *Sun* staff that, at a loss for a lead story, she "gave Ross one". She also confided that the incident was "just the normal kind of thing that happens" between lovers.

Before the incident, Rebekah was comforting David Blunkett over his latest resignation. The David who "agreed" two hours a month supervised contact with "my little boy" William. And she was due at the 50th Woman of the Year lunch at the Guildhall next day. She didn't make that.

Meanwhile, the same night, Ross's on screen hard man brother, Steve McFadden, gets hit by his ex, Angela Bostock. She got a police caution.

The pair play Phil and Grant Mitchell in *East Enders*.

There was an immediate outbreak of uncontrolled mirth in all newspapers, most particularly in parts of the so-called liberal press, such as *The Guardian* and *The Mirror*.

"Bish, bash, bosh" went the cover of *The Mirror*.

"You really couldn't make it up," said *The Guardian's* Kim Fletcher, as did the BBC website, and plenty of other places besides.

"Are the Mitchell brothers big girls blouses or something? These are supposed to be TV's toughest guys. At least it proves they're acting," noted *The Mirror*.

"This is a bad day for Rebekah ... but here, incidentally, are some ways in which it could be worse for Ross Kemp - he could have been attacked by a vicious six-year-old wielding the surprisingly sharp end of a stick of candy-floss ... It's not a good day for him either, let's not forget. Not only have the sacred codes of civilisation within his marriage been irreparably shattered; he also looks like a great big Jessie,"

quipped Zoe Williams in *The Guardian*.

"EastEnders hardman is beaten up by lover," was the main headline on *The Sun* referring to McFadden. *The Star* had "The Bruise Brothers", "Tough-guy Grant gets floored by the wife", and "Philled in by his ex".

The Daily Express put the phrase "beaten up" in quotation marks, so did *The Independent* with "assault".

"First, and most importantly, there has not been a scintilla of proof that any violence occurred between Wade and her husband". Said Roy Greenslade former editor of the right-on *Mirror*, writing in the right-wing *Daily Telegraph*.

Wade has run domestic violence campaigns in *The Sun* on behalf of Women's Aid and Refuge, and featured pictures of "wife-beating thugs" on its front page.

Only John Waters (the former Mr Sinead O'Connor) in *The Irish Times*, and one or two others, shared FNF's outrage at the amazing double-standard when it comes to domestic violence reporting. Said Waters, "Concepts like 'hypocrisy' and 'double-standards' are inadequate in seeking to comprehend the nature of this corruption ... If he resists he is a 'wife-beater'; if not, he's a 'big girl's blouse'. As propaganda campaigning goes, you have to concede that this is a truly awesome achievement."

"Is domestic violence funny?" asked *The Guardian's* Kim Fletcher. "Well, the only injury here seems to be to a hard man's reputation."

FNF's bet is that Fletcher, and the many other journalists writing in the same vein, would have been sacked if the genders had been reversed. And for sure, a male editor, joking that hitting his wife was "just the normal kind of thing that happens" between lovers would have lost his job.

Under new laws, the police do not need a complaint from a battered wife to prosecute as often the wife is too scared to make one. The same is true when the genders are reversed. Allegedly.

"This House believes that Leave to Remove is given too easily"

was the motion of a debate hosted by Resolution, (formerly the Solicitors Family Law Association) in October. FNF's Jim Parton was there.

Leave to Remove has been one of the toughest nuts to crack for shared parenting campaigners.

If anything, judicial attitudes have hardened since *Poel v Poel* set the precedent, way back in 1970. For example, if a mother applied to take the children to New Zealand, all she had to do was claim she'd feel "distress" if not allowed to emigrate with the kids. The distress would be bad for the children, ergo she must go.

We've been gradually winning our other campaigns - court secrecy is cracking, joint residence is no longer dismissed out of hand, McKenzie friends are now harder to exclude. But the judicial attitude to leave to remove, reinforced by Lord Justice Thorpe, has remained unbending.

Until now.

The motion passed overwhelmingly, 77-19.

The debate was chaired by Mr Justice Wilson who has just gone up to the Appeal Court. For the motion were Stephen Cobb QC and child psychiatrist Mark Berelowitz. Against, were James Turner QC and solicitor Carolyn Usher.

Mark Berelowitz, the only non lawyer on the panel, pointed out that "distress," is very different from "depression." In fact there's little research into the impact of "distress" on a child. He talked of the minimum time a child needs for a "robust" relationship with the father "with room for conflict, discipline and ups and downs."

Overwhelmingly speeches from the floor were in favour of the motion.

I spoke a couple of times, I even get a mention in *Family Law* magazine. I had a go at James Turner's contention that it did not matter whether the mother relocated to Newcastle Upon Tyne or Newcastle, Australia. Good try, James, but not convincing, and I expect you know as much. You can't hug over the internet.

An eloquent point was made by a woman lawyer. If you prepared your client's leave to remove application right down to a picture of the house with a swimming pool in Australia, and the colour brochure from the school, and then made sure that your client ran contact between application and final hearing perfectly so that the man had no grounds for complaint - cynical stuff - the application couldn't fail.

In the audience was Lord Justice Ward, who said in coded judgespeak that we all understood, that there "might well have been a different outcome" if the *Payne v Payne* case had come before him. *Payne v Payne* is the current leading case in Leave to Remove decisions, a Lord Justice Thorpe stuff-dad special.

At the end Wilson said that he hoped that the outcome of this debate would be considered "important" and have influence in the upper judiciary and with parliament.

Conversations afterwards over glasses of wine - which kept coming, thus loosened tongues - were interesting.

One Resolution insider said they'd been very keen that Thorpe LJ didn't attend. Someone commented that the presence of some judges made practitioners reluctant to talk from the floor; and it's true, the debate had been a little sticky; it's amazing how unfree the body corporate of lawyers feels to debate genuinely.

Wilson, said some, may turn out to be a useful a counter-balance to look-after-the-ladies Thorpe LJ on the Appeal Court.

I found that there was wide-spread acknowledgement that things have been unfair. That's very different from the attitude even a few years ago and I think this may turn out to have been a watershed event.



The top three shared parenting cases

given in the last issue of *McKenzie* (page 14) were,

1. *D v D (Shared Residence Order) [2001] 1 FLR 495 (D v D)*;
2. *Re A (Children) (Shared Residence) [2002] 1 FCR 177 (Re A)*;
3. and *Re F (Shared Residence Order) [2003] 2 FLR 397 (Re F)*.

FNF's legal eagles have pointed out to the editor that this list is incomplete, not to say, Wrong.

Substitute this *Re A* for another "A" case from 2002 and reported in the Family Court Report. *Re A (Minors)(Joint Residence) [2003] 3FCR 656 CA* was the landmark case where the Court of Appeal for the first time substituted a Joint Residence order for Sole Residence + Contact, on the grounds that the reality of the amount of time spent with the respective parents made a Joint Residence order appropriate to reflect that reality. It is a very useful case for arguing for Joint Residence when father has more time than the conventional alternate weekends and half of all holidays.

A 4th case must also be added

to the list of leading cases - the 2004 Wall J case *A v. A (Shared Residence) [2004] 1FLR 1195 FD* which is well known.

A 5th case is the recent *Re R [2005] EWCA Civ.542 19/4/05 CA*. This highly significant case will be written up in a future *McKenzie*.

Re A (Children)(Shared Residence) [2002] 1FCR 177 CA is definitely NOT one of the 3 leading Joint Res cases. It is a negative case, where a Joint Residence order was set aside and Sole Residence substituted - in fact 2 Sole Residence orders, as the siblings were split between the parents. The facts of the case were unusual; it is probably only useful as a case precedent for (in appropriate circumstances) splitting siblings between parents which of course the courts rarely do. Here boy went to father and girls to mother.

And another correction

There are two different levels of proof for finding that abuse has occurred (not 3 as stated in the last *McK*). The criminal standard is "beyond reasonable doubt" while the civil standard, applicable in most cases of the kind FNF members find themselves in, is "the balance of probabilities," that is to say 50% probable or better.

The 50% probability formula allows the judge, without explaining himself, to use the tired old formula, "Where the evidence of the father and the of the mother differed, I preferred the evidence of ..." (Guess who).

Re G (Children) (Residence: Making of Order), Ward, Clarke, Neuberger LLJ is about when a

judge should or should not make
an order against the generally accepted principle of making "No Order".

"No Order" can lead to disaster, when the agreement between parents is trampled all over. Generally at FNF we recommend that you get an order as a fall-back position when contact starts to go awry. (*The Times* 14/9/05)

Too many LIPS (I)

Lord Woolf has retired as Lord Chief Justice to be replaced by Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers. Phillips blames an increase in litigants in person for a rise in the number of applications for permission to appeal. "The application to have permission carries with it the right to have an oral hearing. So it turns into a mini-appeal process. It takes a lot of court time. Nearly 40% are by litigants in person. We refuse permission in about 90% of cases on the grounds that there is no arguable case."

Lord Philips takes over from the Lord Chancellor as head of the judiciary when the Reform Act 2005 comes into force in April 2006. He will sit on civil and family appeals as well as criminal cases that have been the traditional preserve of the post-holder.

Too many LIPS (II)

In October's issue of *Family Law* there is a long article about *McKenzie* friends, by Lucy Reed, barrister, of Tanfield Chambers.

This is in the wake of "The Matter of the Children of Mr O'Connell, Mr Whelan and Mr Watson" ([2005] *EWCA Civ* 759, [2005] 2 *FLR* 967) which has substantially strengthened the right to a *McKenzie* friend in court. Two of the three were FNF members, and it's only the latest example of how FNF has helped push the law in positive directions. Naturally *McKenzie* covered the case extensively in issue 67.

"It is obvious," asserts Ms Reed breezily, "that a large portion of those litigants requesting the help of a *McKenzie* friend are likely to be parties who have been refused public funding because their case has been seen as having slim chances of success..."

No, no, no, darling, and somewhat illustrative of the patronising attitude your profession has towards decent people forced, or who choose, to litigate in person.

We find that lawyers are capable of messing up even quite good cases. But actually, most LIPS can't afford lawyers,

being above the very low Legal Aid threshold. Or they've made an informed decision not to afford lawyers, because they'd like to keep family money back for the family.

The Supreme Court Library closed in August at the Royal Courts of Justice without any advance notice. The building space is being converted, you guessed it, into new courtrooms for the Family Division. This is a major blow to LIPs, who were the main users of the free facilities in the Library, especially to those who had cases in the High Court or Court of Appeal. The excellent collections of books and law reports have gone into storage; DCA minister Harriet Harman says there is no definite plan to re-establish the Library elsewhere.

It's worth complaining

Freddie O'Neill wrote several issues back of his battles to see his children, and in particular the injustices he'd suffered at the hands of Derby City Council's social services department. Well, after suing them with the help of Bindman and Partners, (and he had the support of his MP Chris Smith), he's been awarded an undisclosed sum in compensation and his legal costs.

At a case conference more than 10 years ago, social workers decided that he was "a serious risk" to his children, and recommended that he should have no contact with his son Niall. This followed allegations in private law proceedings that Derby now accepts were unsubstantiated.

Freddie has lost many years with his children. But it is important that those dealt such injustices should make formal complaints and see them through. Mistakes will continue to be made, but at least the number of high-handed, lazy or prejudiced decisions about children in all sorts of legal proceedings will reduce.

Said Freddie in a letter to the Director of Social Services, "Me and my children will never again be able to get back what we have lost through this sick experience. Your department can never pay enough compensation or say sorry enough."

We can only hope that Derby has learnt a lesson, and others will be protected. (*See also, letters on complaining on page 17*).

Cafcass have updated their complaints procedure

Go to www.cafcass.gov.uk/ and search for their Comments Compliments and Complaints page.

It's easy to be over-awed by your court appearance. Simon Clayton, fed up with the lack of progress in his case over many appearances turned up to his day at the High Court to be greeted by "ten suits". So what did he wear? His loudest Hawaiian

shirt and shorts.

"The judge complimented me on my competent case presentation," said Simon, "though he rejected all my points. At no point did he mention my thought-provoking attire, which I wore deliberately to make the point that I'm sick to death with it all..."

Huge Court Fee Increases Threatened

by *Craig Pickering*
In September the Department of Constitutional Affairs (DCA) published a consultation paper which threatened huge increases in fees for various Court procedures. Overall they would raise Court income by 155%, though on a percentage basis some increases were way above that.

The increases were targeted at cases in family law, including Child Support, family proceedings and private law family fees in the higher courts. The rationale was simple: to hit financial targets set by the Treasury.

FNF has put in a strong response,

pointing out the injustice and ill-effects that would flow from these proposals, for children and their parents when involved in these proceedings. We also pointed out how offensive it was to propose holding down fees for domestic violence, adoption and public law child care cases because of the supposed particular sensitivities of these types of case, as if contact, for example, lacked sensitivity!

Craig Pickering has authored FNF's response to this consultation, which is available on fnf.org.uk

The cost of seeking contact with a child in care will rise more than seven-fold from £20 to £150. The cost of issuing a divorce petition, which was raised to £210 earlier this year, will now be £300.

President of the Family Division, Sir Mark Potter, disclosed that more family work would be "cascaded down" to magistrates because of a shortage of senior judges. Lord Falconer, the Lord Chancellor, is apparently not prepared to increase the

number of High Court judges. But Circuit judges, the next tier down, are also overburdened. They, in turn, would have to send work down to District judges and magistrates sitting in family proceedings courts.

Family magistrates "should be encouraged to sit substantially longer than their usual 26 half-days in order to increase their availability and build up their expertise," Sir Mark said.

The fee increases are designed to raise an additional £50 million a year, enabling the civil courts to recover all their costs from court users. This policy is not open for consultation: the only question on which Lord Falconer is seeking comments is whether these particular increases are the best way of meeting his targets. Lord Falconer will overspend his legal aid budget by £130 million this year and has to find the money from other areas.

The planned increases will apply to all types of civil claim (i.e. including non-family civil cases). (*source - The Daily Telegraph 24/9/05*)

Life on the Helpline

by *Anthony Esler*

After some very good training by Roger Macy, I started on the Helpline in December 2004. I do Thursdays, 6 to 10pm. So far I've answered nearly 100 calls; anything from ten minutes to an hour. I get around 5 calls an evening.

We tick boxes on a monitoring sheet to send to HQ after each session.

The NRP box (non resident parent) gets ticked most often, as you would expect. The vast majority of calls are fathers regarding a CE (contact enquiry). We get a few from RPs (resident parent) and from NPs (New Partners).

Just tonight I had a GP (grandparent) and then there are always a fair number of NMEs (new member enquiries), usually tied in with contact problem.

When it comes to the type of problem, there are quite a few DVAs (domestic violence allegations) and some DVVs (DV victim - from fathers).

PR (parental responsibility) queries are common, usually tied in with contact queries. There are also some CAs (child abuse allegations).

By far the greatest majority are CDs (contact denial). The CSA produces one or two queries.

So this gives, I hope, an idea of the range of calls we deal with. As you can imagine, the situations are varied and infinite, so perhaps to give a flavour, a couple of examples, one from tonight as I am on duty and one from last week.

Case 1.

An unmarried father from Cheshire, 6 year old son. The split was shortly after mother got pregnant. She is now on benefits and has a 2 year old son by another man. He has reasonable contact of 12/24 hours every

weekend - reasonable, that is, considering he has no PR, and has never been near a court, i.e. mother is 'granting' him this - which of course she can stop at any moment.

He is worried about her lack of care (he says she let the boy go a month with a bad skin complaint without taking him to the doctor. She was happy to leave this 6 year old with a 14 year old as babysitter while she went on the razzle - these are but two examples.) They live 60 miles apart so Shared Residence might appear out of the question, (FNF doesn't think so!). Residence with his new Partner of eight years and their child is another option. He is joining FNF. He may represent himself with a McKenzie friend from his local branch. 40 minutes.

Case 2.

Herts father, two boys, 11 & 12. The wife is regularly drunk and has a police record and a forthcoming trial for assaulting the father. So far he has received two black eyes on separate occasions and has been stabbed with a kitchen knife.

He asked divorce advice. Should he stay in the house (like his life depended on it!) and a discussion on the merits of contact with shared residence or sole residence to himself, citing the mother's aggression to him and to the boys. 35 minutes.

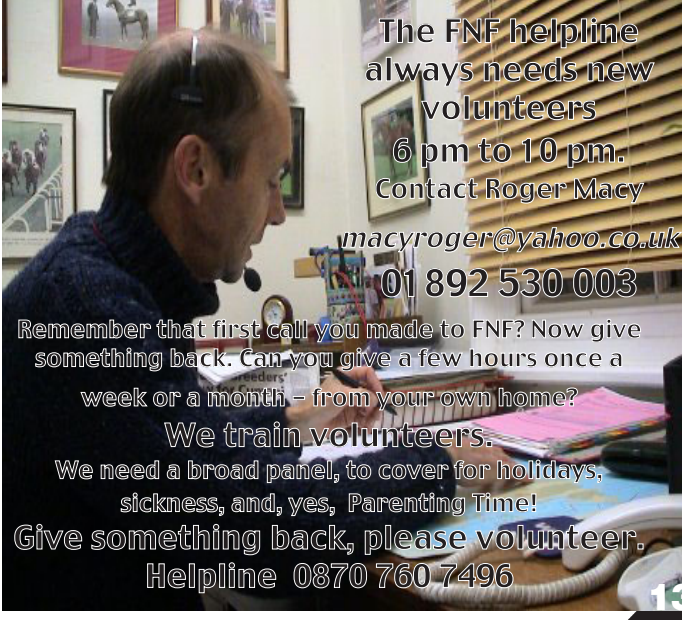
We each have our own methods of dealing with calls.

The caller usually launches into his case but after a few seconds I stop him. I ask his first name to build personal contact, and the age and sex of his children, his ex's first name, and where everyone lives. Once I've written this outline down, his story is far easier to follow.

I tend to be fairly forthright in my views, while other Helpliners maybe take a more listening role. There are many ways of skinning the cat.

The main thing is that callers appear to be very satisfied, often thank me for my time and advice and quite often ask for my name (I only give my first name).

There is no doubt in my mind that the Helpline provides an invaluable service. It is also very satisfying when one comes off at 10 pm (5 minutes to go tonight!) knowing one has helped half a dozen worried parents a little way along the road in their lives.



The FNF helpline always needs new volunteers
6 pm to 10 pm.
Contact Roger Macy
imacyroger@yahoo.co.uk
01 892 530 003

Remember that first call you made to FNF? Now give something back. Can you give a few hours once a week or a month - from your own home?

We train volunteers.
We need a broad panel, to cover for holidays, sickness, and, yes, Parenting Time!

Give something back, please volunteer.
Helpline 0870 760 7496

Gender Watch (I)

"At present, when all the known factors are taken into account, it is possible to predict with 80% accuracy which three year old boys will become violent men..." said psychiatrist Oliver James (*Observer Magazine* 10/7/05).

Scary stuff. He doesn't say whether the outcome for girls can be predicted so easily. But then the trouble is always with boys, (and men), as far as this sort of commentator goes.

Gender differences

A new computer games degree course has failed to attract a single woman. The University of Derby had 106 applications from men and has set up woman only summer camps in the hope of attracting females - presumably away from all the plumbing courses they're going on. (*Evening Standard* 9/5/05)

Gender watch (II)

Here we go again
"....All too often, however, drug treatment and prevention services concentrate primarily on problem users, neglecting the needs of the overwrought mothers and impressionable younger brothers and sisters who get caught up in the chaos...."

So at first thought, even the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, from whose journal *Search* this is taken, blank the existence of fathers with possible contributions to make and needs of their own in the families of young drug users.

But on second thoughts, perhaps the exclusion of fathers in the first place was a factor in exposing the young people to the risk.

John Baker

Gender watch (III) - men are brainier

Men are more intelligent than women, reports *the Daily Mail*. Psychology professor Richard Lynn of the University of Ulster and Dr Paul Irwing, senior lecturer at Manchester University, concluded that women's IQs were, on average, 5 points lower. Their report was published in the *British Journal of Psychology* in August.

Dr Irwing said, "This may go some way to explain the greater numbers of

men achieving distinction in various kinds in which a high IQ is required, such as chess grandmasters, Nobel prizewinners and the like."

Girls do better than boys up to the age of 16, when boys catch up, and by 21 they are significantly more intelligent.

However, gender warriors will be relieved to hear that women use their intelligence more efficiently. The extra brainpower makes men better suited to "tasks of high complexity" but tends not to be used for everyday tasks.

Irwing said, "There is some evidence to suggest that, for any given level of IQ, women are able to achieve more than men, possibly because they are more conscientious and better adapted to sustained periods of hard work."

"The small male advantage in IQ," concludes Irwing is "likely to be of most significance for tasks of high complexity such as complex problem solving in maths, engineering and physics. And in areas calling for high spatial ability."

Like the supermarket car park?

New Mortgage specially for divorcees

In the Mortgage Finance Gazette national contest Yorkshire Building Society was awarded Innovator of the Year for its Fresh Start mortgage - the only mortgage aimed at helping people buy a home after they have been divorced or separated.

The "Fresh Start" mortgage has interest-free repayments for the first six months and cash-back of £400 to help with legal bills. It is also possible to borrow up to 100% of the value of the property with no higher lending charge.

(It's a wonderful piece of double-speak is "cash-back". McKenzie reminds readers that cash-back has to be given, er, back in due course. It'll be hidden in a fee or a percentage somewhere).

The product is available at a fixed rate of 5.49% to the end of 2010, or a tracker at one percentage point above the Bank of England base rate, giving a current pay rate of 5.75%, for six

months. This will go up to 1.25 percentage points above base rate for the following four years.

One drawback to the mortgage is that redemption penalties on the loan are "hefty", says *The Daily Telegraph*, "rather like marriage itself."

However, divorcees taking the mortgage also get a free counselling service, an advice guide and referral to a family law practitioner (who will make them poorer again).

Greg Pogonowski of Ample Financial Services, member of FNF, says "This is an interesting product, but you could sometimes get better results for your personal circumstances with others." Greg has agreed to donate a proportion of any fees he earns from referrals from FNF to the charity. So if you call him for financial advice, mention FNF, and we benefit. greg@ampleholdings.co.uk. 01522 874949.

Who's happier after separation?

To celebrate the launch of the mortgage, The Yorkshire Building Society commissioned one of those bits of pointless research we all love, like "Men are brainier".

While women are more likely to feel relieved, liberated, and happy, men are more likely to feel sad, devastated, betrayed, confused and even suicidal after separation.

57% of people who separated in the last two years say they are happier now, while among those who broke up two or more years ago, 74% are happier.

2 years post-split, here's how the sexes felt.

Relieved: 53% women 46% of men.

Liberated: 46% women, 37% men. *Happy:* 31% v 22%. *Sad:* 48% v 56%

Suicidal: 3% v 7% - (this last is born out by far higher figures for actual suicides by men).

Men were more likely than women to drink more (33% v 23%), seek casual sex (23% v 12%), contact an old flame (13% v 9%) or join a dating agency (21% v 14%).

More men throw themselves into their work "to distract themselves" (16% v 13%)

- but then perhaps that's because the real "distraction" - the kids - have gone.

Men were more likely to remarry first. Two or more years after a divorce, 15% of men were remarried (v 5%).

Women were happier to co-habit or date; 23% were dating within the first two years compared to 18% of men, and 25% were cohabiting (men 23%).

And the finances?

After two years only 45% of men and 47% of women were worse off. At this point, 26% of men and 28% of women were better off, while 25% of men and 22% of women said there was no change to their financial position.

Judge John Curran told a youth crime conference in Cardiff that single mums

and broken homes were the root of the crime problem. He said that, although the "vast majority" of separated parents raise their children well, "This is not a case of 'judge slams single mums'. But many of the parents who create this kind of environment for their children are very young and inexperienced. They are ignorant of what is required to bring up a well-adjusted child." (*The Sun and other media*, 8/11/05)

New Zealand has introduced a new civil union,

which gives rights nearly identical to marriage, but without the vows. Unlike in the UK this will be open to heterosexual couples as well as same-sex. Some people in Britain argue that our gay only civil partnerships are discriminatory against heterosexuals.

www.divorceaid.co.uk

is a non-commercial website staffed by volunteers that offers advice on resolving the financial and emotional issues surrounding divorce.

Moving house in the near future? Don't forget to notify the FNF office of your new address

Angels in Spain

by
Griffin Stone

One day in Spain, I met two angels.

Early on a Saturday morning in June 2003, I boarded an Iberia flight from Madrid to Alicante. It is a trek I make every two weeks to see my daughter, Lydia. At the time, she was two and a half years old. For the previous seven months, I had been seeing her under less than ideal conditions - for a couple of hours in the morning and again in the afternoon every other Saturday and Sunday, under her mother's or grandmother's close supervision, with the garden gate locked to keep me from kidnapping her. This was especially frustrating because it wasn't supposed to be this way - the order granting her mother leave to remove Lydia from England also gave me generous contact, including overnight stays. But within a few months of arriving in Spain, her mother went back to court in England to suspend the contact order, and, without so much as a full hearing, a judge annulled it, leaving me with nothing.

After I took my seat, a flight attendant came by with a little girl with a card strung around her neck, which airlines use for children flying unaccompanied by an adult. She had big brown eyes, sandy blonde hair and the beginning of a summer sun tan. The flight attendant sat her in the seat next to mine, and a few seconds later she began to whimper and then to cry.

"Why are you crying?" I asked in Spanish.

"Because I have to go see my father and he doesn't love me," she replied.

"What do you mean your father doesn't love you?"

"My mommy told me that, because he won't come to pick me up in Madrid. That's why I have to fly alone."

I asked questions, gently I hope, and she went on to explain. Her name was Angela Embarca. She lived with her mother and her mother's new partner in Madrid. Her father lived in Altea, near Alicante, with his new partner. She was going to spend a month there - maybe, unless she wanted to come home earlier. She told me her father worked a lot - he seemed to have a store or other small business - but that his girlfriend took very good care of her and she liked her very much.

"You know what? I have a feeling your father loves you very much," I told her.

How could he not love her? I was already smitten!

"Do you think so?" she asked.

"I'm sure of it," I said, taking a risk I can only hope was worth it.

Once that was said, she changed the subject. "I have two dogs and a cat," she told me. "One dog in Madrid, one in Altea, and a cat in Altea."

And the conversation went along in that vein, with no more tears. She was doing what children in her position do, putting the hurt aside and getting on with it.

I resolved that morning never to leave Lydia in doubt that I loved her, so that when she hears, "How can your father say he loves you when he behaves like this?" - which she sadly has already heard many times - a little voice inside will say, "I know my Daddy loves me."

That night, in the town near Alicante where my daughter lives, I had dinner with Angela Casa, a friend of friends in Madrid who had set us up. Angela also had a daughter, was divorced, and was an aware mother who fostered her daughter's relationship with her father. Angela and I became friendly, and, after a few more weekend visits, romantically involved.

Two months later, my ex boarded a plane for England with our daughter and one-way tickets home. She wrote to the judge who had just heard our case in Spain and informed him she had moved back permanently to England, so his court no longer had jurisdiction. I launched a proceeding under the Hague Convention on International Child Abduction, and three hearings and ten weeks later, my ex returned to Spain with Lydia.

Meanwhile, I had obtained a contact order which restored day visits. I knew, though, the tactics of my ex and her mother, and that they would try to sabotage contact at the pick-ups. I expected hysterics and abuse, as well as false accusations of aggression or violence. To protect myself, I asked Angela to come with me.

The first morning I went to pick up Lydia, Angela's presence took my ex by surprise. Our daughter wasn't ready, so I asked my ex to get her ready. She replied that I had to come into the house to get her, which I refused to do without Angela. The abuse started. "What kind of a father are

you? Stop this juvenile behaviour and come into this house!" But before it could really get going, Lydia broke the impasse by running out of the house in her socks and jumping into my arms. I started to walk with her to the car, and to my relief her mother went back in to get her shoes. Mother and grandmother made only a slight scene that morning as we left.

It got worse. In subsequent pick-ups, I was greeted by shaking fists, by ranting, by insults, by accusations, and "How can you say you love this child?!" One morning, while Lydia stood on the terrace just a few feet from me, I started to walk away. I said to Angela, who was waiting off the property, "Let's go."

"Not without your daughter!"

I walked back up the path, put my arms out, Lydia jumped into them, and away we went.

On one pick-up, the grandmother came onto a terrace and said Lydia wasn't ready because of an accident in the bathroom. It sounded suspicious, but we had no choice but to wait. Ten minutes later, a Guardia Civil jeep came around the corner, and my ex came out of the property, shaking with rage, saying she wanted to file a complaint against Angela for trespassing. We hadn't been on the property, and unknown to my ex, Angela's daughter was in the car waiting with us.

"But my mommy didn't go in there," the eight year old girl blurted out. The *denuncia* was filed, but went nowhere.

The pick-ups went on like this for two months. The stress took its toll on my relationship with Angela, and by the end of the two months we were no longer romantically involved. Still, she came with me without fail, despite a 40-mile drive and the denuncia against her.

As expected, I was accused of many things, and ten months later was brought up on charges of inflicting bodily harm. Angela came to testify; my ex's accusation was incoherent, and I was acquitted with a verdict that left little doubt that the allegation was an invention.

Coming to pick up Lydia had become a point of pride for Angela. "Once I met her and saw what was happening, I had to be there," she once told me. "If I didn't go, I would have been guilty of letting something wrong happen when I could have helped prevent it."

Without her, I wouldn't have the relationship I have today with Lydia.

Two angels in one day.

NSPCC: who's the abuser?

(cont. from back page)

The judges sentencing guideline website, www.sentencing-guidelines.gov.uk shows convictions for assaults on children 1994-2003. Men: 1743 convictions. Women: 2106.

Men were jailed in around 40% of cases, women in 20%, which implies either

that male cruelty is worse, or that there is a double-standard on sentencing.

John Baker writes:

The NSPCC repeats Women's Aid research that 29 children were killed during contact visits over 10 years. This is 3% of the NSPCC's estimate of the number of children killed by abuse and neglect in the same period.

If children spend an average 52 nights with a contact parent, that is 14% of their time. Yet 3% get killed.

Based on the number of contact visits, which we estimate by assuming that the 4 million children living apart from a parent visit on average fortnightly, the chance of any child being one of the 29 is about 3 in 100 million.

Contact saves lives.



Get us mums onside with FNF

I think it would be useful to try to encourage mothers and women to get involved towards your stand.

Years ago, when my ex mentioned the word PR Order, I freaked and cut access to once a month for a couple of months. Things did get sorted luckily and I feel awful when I think what I did. At the end of the day a PR Order can make a woman fear the dad is going to have power to run off with the child. I don't know how you can talk mums around; I came to my own senses.

The other reason I think mums would cut contact is to get the father out of her life, obviously this means she is not putting the child's best interest as paramount.

I regret what I did for those couple of months, and feel for parents who cannot see their children. You get to accept that you have to have some type of contact with the child's father, to an extent.

I also realised that the PR Order has huge benefits for the child.

Imagine if the mother died (God forbid), the legal wrangle with relatives etc. may end up only harming the child. A PR Order would mean the father can bring up his child, have the right. The child in turn has the right to be brought up by their dad, and build a relationship.

I am with a partner at the moment who has 3 hours access a week at a contact centre. He used to have weekly overnight contact once a month, but that changed once he mentioned PR Order. It breaks my heart to see how hurt and down he feels at not being allowed to see his child laugh, play or love.

Denise H, Exeter

Excuses, excuses

I joined FNF two weeks ago because I couldn't believe our legal system can give such a raw deal to absent fathers.

I've put some of my frustrations down in writing. It is a bit long; sorry about that - I am a journalist so I ought to know better...

On the face of it, my story is probably no different from one any FNF member can tell. The difference is that my son is being denied the right to see his father - even though I only live next-door-but-one from him.

From the day I left the family home almost 12 months ago, access to Bradley - now aged three - has been kept to the absolute minimum at my former partner's insistence. And for the last three months, it's been non-existent. I've been given

no end of excuses. Cold, nits, flu. Curiously, though, on the days he has been "too ill" to see me, he's been well enough to play outside later in the day.

How do I know this? Because I can see him from the kitchen window at my mum's home where I am now living, just two doors away.

But can I go out to him? No chance. To do that would be, according to my own solicitor, "back door access," and that could harm my case.

But it's another story from a council social worker who believes I should because it 'could' help re-establish contact. So who should I believe?

(The solicitor is the one talking bollocks, they often do - McK).

And just to really complicate matters, my former partner is refusing to move out of the house which is in my sole name and I'm still paying the mortgage.

So while the Government bangs on about a fairer CSA system, I'm paying combined mortgage and maintenance of £600-a-month. For a son I'm not even allowed to see.

And did I mention I'm supposed to live somewhere myself too?

Oh, and add onto that the ever-escalating legal bill. I've now had to start contact proceedings and her solicitor is boasting she will secure public funds to take me to court to claim an interest in the property. The ridiculous situation is I have a relatively well-paid job but I can no longer afford to pay a solicitor.

My former partner is legally-aided. One of the letters her solicitor sent me was telling me to stop my friends from talking about her. Is that what legal aid is supposed to be for?

Andrew Harrod

Never Give Up (I)

I thought that as a member of FNF for some 2 years now that I would write with an update of my own three and a half year slog for "Reasonable Access" to my daughter Jessica in the hope that it may encourage some other unfortunates.

I started my struggle in May 2002 full of optimism. I put my entire faith in the courts, along with, as it turns out, some very greedy solicitors, only to have it eaten away over the past 40 months. I thought of giving up altogether, something I know I would never have been allowed to do either by my own mother or my own conscience. Then there was my little girl, who, I knew, loved her daddy very much.

But to cut this very long story short, some 3 years and 4 months on, after at least 20 hearings, at at least 5 different courts,

before at least 8 different Judges, in at least 4 different counties, after some 20-30 Court Directions and/or Orders (totally ignored by the mother, of course), my life being run according to the wishes of my ex partner, including being evaluated by a psychiatrist, being watched and scrutinised by umpteen 'professionals' (with all of whom I managed to form a decent rapport, fortunately), in numerous contact centres, some of whose rules and policies are so strictly adhered to you are not even allowed to climb a flight of stairs without permission.

My character and my mother's, who is party to my proceedings, were assassinated in and out of court, all whilst trying to live life as normally as possible, retain your sanity, hold down a highly stressful job in order to keep up maintenance payments even though you are not being allowed to see your child, there is a light at what has been a very long dark tunnel, a happy ending to a dismal, and by no means unique story, although to me it's not so much an ending as a new beginning.

A Judge, at the end of his tether with the mother, reserved the case to himself wherever he was sitting, and appointed a Guardian ad litem for my daughter.

This 'Guardian Angel,' as I prefer to call her, saw to it that regular contact was resumed immediately, that continuity is ensured, and also that everything that takes place now involves the feelings and wishes of my daughter, the most important person in all of this wretched business.

Consequently, I have now seen my daughter three times since the Guardian's appointment in August and on Saturday 24 September we went out as a family for the first time in almost three and a half years, this being the first time Jessica's grandparents had seen her in that time, and it was marvellous.

The stress, frustration and heartbreaking disappointments all melted away in a moment we had dared not let ourselves believe would ever happen.

Of course I don't expect it to be all plain sailing from here.

But the moral of this story;

1. Try to get your case reserved to one Judge, no matter what it takes.
2. If the Judge is reluctant to attach a Penal Notice to any Order (aren't they always!), ask for the appointment of a Guardian ad litem; this, as it turned out, was the next best thing.

I have written this letter to thank Families Need Fathers and their members for all their support since I joined. I repeat what my Mother has said to me many times and to all those despairing at the moment: NEVER GIVE UP.

Lee Leaning

PS. If I can be of any assistance to any FNF members with regard to their own cases I would be only too pleased to help. I can be emailed on susanleaning@aol.com, mine and my mother's shared email address.

No Legal Aid

OK, so you've most likely heard this all before but here goes:

I was divorced a while back, (these things do happen) and the words of the Monkees come to mind; "It's a little bit me, it's a little bit you." I saw my three children on an almost daily basis until suddenly out of the blue my ex-wife wouldn't let me, that was six years ago. No reason has ever been given to me.

I have tried to gain access but to no avail, last week I received a letter from my ex-wife's solicitors, informing me that her and her partner wished to change their name. I took legal advice, the solicitor I went to was very good, pointing out I had a very good case, not only regarding the name change, but also access, until it came to money. I am self-employed along with my current wife, we hardly see each other doing 20/21 hour days between us. While on paper we earn above the Legal Aid threshold the reality is we are keeping our heads above water, just. We simply cannot afford to fight the case through the courts, no matter how much we want to. Of course I could give up work altogether claim unemployment, and get Legal Aid thrown at me!

So where do I turn? Do I simply give up ever seeing my children again?

Bob Beech

BBeechb@aol.com

(McKenzie answers: you'll just have to represent yourself. As other letters in these pages testify, FNF can help you).

It's worth complaining (I)

With regards to your story in the last McKenzie concerning SFLA/Resolution complaints.

You said, "Previously you could not complain, for example, about the conduct of the opposing solicitor and no complaint against an SFLA (now Resolution) member had ever been upheld".

Following the conclusion of my ex-wife's solicitor's involvement in our divorce and contact proceedings, I made a complaint to the SFLA about their member, Peter Littlewood, a partner in the firm of Chafes, 20 Market Place, Stockport SK1 1EY.

I made seven complaints, of which six were upheld, to do with needlessly antagonistic, sarcastic correspondence, some of which implied that I had acted in bad faith, when I hadn't.

Everything was submitted to the SFLA and they passed it on to Mr Littlewood for an explanation which resulted in a rather feeble attempt to deflect matters from himself. I rejected this and the offer of an apology for my feelings.

It was then returned to the solicitor who gave a more detailed defence of his position. I submitted a four page reply answering his points and asked for

progression of complaint. I then received a letter from the SFLA complaints committee who stated that upon initial consideration, they upheld my 6 complaints against the solicitor.

I then received a letter inviting me to attend a hearing, if I agreed, with the solicitor.

I wrote back stating that I only wanted to know that I was right to feel aggrieved over the way I was treated, which the complaints committee had done. I did not seek 'revenge' on the solicitor but merely wanted some good to disseminate from it.

I have some understanding for his position; I did actually email him once to thank him for his support after a difficult hearing. I believe it is a dilemma for solicitors when they are having to act for a hostile client whom they have to satisfy.

I am also waiting for the Parliamentary Ombudsman to finalise a second part of a complaint against Cafcass. They have informed me that they found against Cafcass on the first part and as far as they are aware, it is the first time a finding of bias has been found against a Cafcass Officer. I will disclose the final notice of the Ombudsman's report to head office when it is received by me.

Luke Norman

Treasurer, FNF Burton Upon Trent

lukeyjs1@tiscali.co.uk

Never Give Up (II) and It's worth complaining (II)

The major problems with contact began three years after we separated, in the year 2001. Although up to this point there had been trouble with the contact arrangements we had just about managed to sort things out between us.

I got a short letter from my ex one day saying that she was moving a hundred miles away with my sons, 7 and 9. She gave just two weeks' notice.

After the move my ex wouldn't answer any of my letters about contact. The contact she allowed was very limited, a weekend every seven weeks. Previously I had been seeing the children most weekends.

When I sent a solicitor's letter to complain about the access arrangements she stopped all contact for five months. This was a very difficult time for me.

I was a member of FNF but didn't feel at that stage able to do the legal work myself because I was upset about what was happening. My ex was saying she never wanted me to see the children again.

I had a very expensive Citizens'-Advice-Bureau-recommended solicitor who didn't act on my instructions. He made errors booking a court hearing in my area instead of near the home of the children's mother, as he should have. He started to act strangely. I then had a letter

from him, after I had just paid a considerable amount of money to him on account, that he was now no longer trading. This delayed the first directions hearing.

As well as my contact struggles I had an eighteen-month battle with the Law Society to get my money back.

Eventually I received the money from the Law Society, with a reasonable amount of compensation. The solicitor had gone bankrupt. He had not responded to the Law Society's enquiries. He had given up law.

I would encourage other members to persist with the Law Society if they receive shoddy work from their solicitor.

My next solicitor was more competent. Weekend and holiday contact were established at the first directions hearing after a break of five months.

But my ex wife continued to be intransigent.

I had run out of money so I took on the legal work myself. FNF was very helpful over the phone whenever I needed them. I also attended one or two of the branch meetings.

Four more county court hearings followed. After having one hearing with an unsympathetic judge, and after taking advice from FNF, I managed to write to the court and reserve a judge who was more understanding. He later said he had taken a special interest in the case.

This worked much better for the children and me. I would suggest to other litigants in person to try and reserve a particular judge for their case.

I have now been to court seven times over a three year period. I have tackled four of the hearings myself. Three Cafcass reports have been filed.

The last three hearings have been with the same understanding District Judge.

I would advise others to act in person, rather than employ solicitors wherever possible. It certainly makes matters more straightforward. It is a lot less expensive. I also gained a feeling of achievement through doing the legal work myself.

Although the system is still not great for fathers it has kept me in regular contact with my two sons now aged 12 and 14. If I had not gone to court I probably would not be seeing them at all.

The initial amount of contact agreed at court has been reduced. At present I see the boys for one day visiting contact every four weeks. More positively my relationship with the boys has now improved and they are saying they want to spend more time with me soon.

My ex has also become a bit more co-operative. I hope this encourages others to persevere during difficult times and not to give up.

Howard Read

Web support (I)

Hi, just wanted to invite you to my website, imadadmom.com, a 52 chapter how-to book on single parenting specifically for dads.

Dave Crowley
Kawikc@aol.com

Web support (II)

I thought that you would be intrigued to learn about a company I helped to create that is making a difference for over 3,500 families in 49 states and 9 countries. It is a website called the OurFamilyWizard parenting website. It provides parents with a plethora of helpful parenting tools. For the first time ever, parents can co-ordinate schedules, health records, immunization histories, expense sharing, school information, virtual document storage and much more on a website specifically designed to deal with the issues that arise in a co-parenting situation.

Our website is committed to removing conflict and improving the lives of children. In fact, we have judges in at least 16 states and 1 Canadian province who have begun ordering families to use the site in contested cases.

Jai R. Kissoon
Phone/Fax: (952) 548-8121
jkissoon@ourfamilywizard.com
www.OurFamilyWizard.com

(Editor's note: the websites mentioned above are both commercial, but potentially useful. Let FNF know).

Web support (III)

Another useful one is
www.dougloudenback.com/vis/VisitationGuidelines.pdf

Web support (IV - PAS)

I am a member of FNF living in the Netherlands. At present I am involved in a series of Court Events (my 16th so far and some more to follow) and the psychologist Dr. L.F. Lowenstein has been a tremendous help in my case. His publications give a good insight to the destructive process of Parental Alienation.

Dr. Lowenstein would like to share his publications to all fathers like myself so that they can take good knowledge of the PAS he describes in his publications. I have set up a website for him that enables this, so far with most of his publications. Although the website is still under construction, so more articles will be added, FNF will, I hope, find it useful already.

M. McM
Name and address supplied
www.parental-alienation.info

FNF email forums are fantastic

Having just spent half an hour or so going through recent posts in both groups I am kicking myself for not having joined these sooner. Withholding of birth certificates, passports and medical/GP details, difficulty arranging school parents' evenings, CSA mis-calculations,

hostile ex-partner, broken agreed contact and other issues I've faced over recent months and years are all listed in numerous posts and sensible advice is included for each and every one. I should have joined these mailing lists years ago.

The downside of FNF (and other similar groups) is that my problems seem almost pathetic in comparison to the horrendous stories reported on-line and in McKenzie. I have, at times, felt a fraud belonging to FNF as I have reasonable contact with my son.

These posts have allowed me to realise that many others are in my position and, for that alone, I cannot thank you enough. These postings are pure gold.

Jason Holloway
jason.holloway2@ntlworld.com

And where can I live?

Housing is one of the greatest needs after relationship breakdown. Whenever I have applied to get on the Council waiting list, referring to my child contact situation, I have been told that I was regarded as a single man, and the Council had no statutory duty to house me. I would not be put on the waiting list, and was advised to go and rent privately. Not being on the Council Housing list means one cannot be nominated to Housing Associations, which control many properties.

Amidst the gloom, there is hope and enlightenment! The Lettings Policy of Canterbury City Council Housing Services says that "lone parents with visiting children" will be considered for a 1-bedroom home, if they are statutorily entitled by reason of homelessness, overcrowding, etc. Strong local connections, e.g. your Ex and children living in Canterbury would help one's application.

Are any other Councils so progressive? Non-resident parents would love to know.

Ned Carson

Jozefina is a Bastard - official

Sorry to read of Jim Parton's plight in dealing with the passport office (*McKenzie 67 - baby Jozefina Parton was refused British nationality even though her father has Parental Responsibility*). As the owner of a foreign wife, I can empathise with the hassle our Government can inflict. However, can I suggest that Jim adopts his daughter? Under the Adoption Act, his daughter will gain citizenship and Jim can then apply for said passport. Of course, Cafcass will be involved, but that I'm sure is - and will generate - another story.

Paul King
Bristol

Jim writes: I can't adopt a child to whom I am already the father. Maybe I shouldn't have got PR...

Paul responds:

Further to my earlier letter. Section 1(1) British Nationality Act 1981 Under s.1(1), a person born in the United

Kingdom on or after 1 January 1983 is a British citizen at birth if, at the time of the birth:

* either parent is a British citizen; or

* either parent is settled in the United Kingdom.

Re the Indefinite Leave to Remain issue - are they trying to claim that the child was born here illegally and therefore should not have British Citizenship? If so, best thing you could have done is abandoned her at birth.

They would then make the assumption she was born here. Then you could have gone and claimed her again and she would be British. In retrospect, easy. Good Luck. Sounds like bureaucracy gone mad again.

Paul K

What is a Parent?

The Chambers 20th Century dictionary (1968) states that a parent is, "One who begets or brings forth; a father or a mother". This means that a child is the direct biological descendant via the egg of the mother who gives birth, and sperm of the father. The introduction of the technological innovation of In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF), or by Donor Insemination (DI), whereby a woman can become a mother (Section 27, The Human Fertilisation & Embryology Act 1990), has altered the definition of 'parent' beyond that given by Chambers. From S.28 the definition of 'father' makes it clear that paternity is created at the time that IVF or DI takes place.

A recent case in the Californian Supreme Court ruled that a female partner of a woman who gave birth by artificial insemination, was legally the child's second mother. Thus in U.S. law a child can have two mothers but no father.

In the U.K. similar considerations are coming to expression when the Chair of the Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority (HFEA) said, "It is absolutely clear if you think about the changes in society and the different ways that families can be constituted, that it is anachronistic for the law to include a statement about the child's need for a father." S.13(5)

Questions arising:

1. Does the child have the right to know about the circumstances of its conception and birth?
2. What changes should be made to the Birth Certificate to accommodate the changes taking place via IVF and DI?

Reg George
Ilford

ceridwen.george@talk21.com

www.childsupportanalysis.com

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around

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Do you have early copies of McKenzie, Access magazine, old newspaper cuttings, or any other artefacts of interest to FNF historians? We've been going over 30 years, and much early material is missing. Send it in.

FNF has many publications. The newest, **How to get the best Cafcass report for your children and yourself** by John Baker is now our bestseller £7.50 to members, £15 to non members inc. p&p

The FNF logo tie

To Order : - Contact Phil Howarth, Secretary, Southport & Northwest FNF. Very useful for official events, visiting the Children's Minister, going on Newnight, AGMs

Also, FNF Xmas cards

01925 537434
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CSA help offered free to FNF members - Kit

Stenning, 020 7423 1000. Before contacting him, check the information on www.fnf.org.uk

Freelance copy editor/proofreader

with experience in magazine editing, offers assistance by checking your letters, articles, documents etc for presentation, grammar, spelling and punctuation for a professional approach. (Already working with FNF member on letters to MP, ombudsman, CAFCASS and a press release). Reduced rate of £10 per hour to FNF members. References available. Enquiries to Nicki Diamond. Tel 01227 265214 njd2210@yahoo.co.uk.

Free b&b near Malvern

Pensioner Percival Owen will give free b&b for weekends at his home five miles from Great Malvern for any visiting father. References please. Collection possible. 07792 720 462 (Orange) or 24 Hookbank Park, Hanley Castle, WR8 0BQ.

Free b&b, Chilterns

Elizabeth Lakey will give free bed and breakfast to any FNF child under 16 at her farm house in the Chilterns. Ideal weekend escape. 01491 638601

make your will on-line follow the link at fnf.org.uk/wills.htm
FNF receives £3 for every will made via this link

Go Public? My web-site falls outside UK jurisdiction & I'll gladly publish for FNF members for a small admin fee. www.duckingstool.com
Dave Covey, Thailand

Is your life proving challenging and you need support to get through the changes? Call David Kirby, Life Coach on 01707-261095 or email: zen6854@zen.co.uk

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DNA watch: need for dads "out-dated"

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 is set for reform. Chair of the HFE Authority, Suzi Leather, has said that one aspect of the Act that is in need of change is the "out-dated" requirement for a father (see letter, page 18).

Similarly, barrister B. Mahendra says in September's *New Law Journal*, "The welfare test requires fertility clinics to assure themselves that there are male 'role models' in the offing. This requirement, when applied to IVF treatment sought by lesbians and single mothers, may appear to be a form of blatant discrimination." He questions whether it would survive a challenge under the Human Rights Act 1998.

Another barrister, Dewinder Birk, adds in July's issue of *Family Law*, that the original passage of the Bill was "long and contentious and compromises had to be made. One clear example is Section 13(5). The need for the father was added in order to placate those who wished assisted reproductive treatment to be only available to the 'traditional' couple consisting of a man and a woman."

What backward thinking fuddy-duddies they must have been back in 1990 to think that children might need fathers.

Meanwhile, in *The Guardian* (3/11/05), journalist Ian Sample (I promise I didn't make that up - ed) reports the case of a 15 year old boy who tracked down his anonymous sperm donor father. The boy lodged his Y-chromosome DNA data on *FamilyTreeDNA.org*. Two other members had DNA similar enough for it to be 50% likely they were related. The Y-chromosome goes down the generations. Girls can't do this to find their fathers, but other routes may open up for them as the science of reading DNA advances.

The two members he found shared the same surname, albeit with different spellings. The boy's mother knew the father's date and place of birth and degree subject. Using *omniTrace.com* he paid to find men born at the same time and place as his father, and lo and behold, there was only one, and his name was like that of the other two.

10 days into his search, the 15 year old boy contacted his biological father.

The end of anonymous semen donations and the fact that you cannot be paid has, it is said, caused the flow of sperm to dry up. "The fact is, we are in a crisis situation," said Sheena Young of the charity Infertility Network UK. But even many of those who gave anonymously, probably when they were skint students, can never be sure a child or several of theirs won't knock on the door one day.

If all this puts no one off, The Bridge Centre, www.thebridgecentre.co.uk, has run an ad in *The Evening Standard*. "Sperm donors needed: bright, active, healthy men needed for a serious purpose, generous expenses paid, London Bridge."

The number of websites set-up to use DNA data to see who is related to whom, for scientific, or relationship reasons, is expanding. *OxfordAncestors.com* helps those whose hobby is tracing their genealogy. Previously, genealogists had to depend on looking at old church records, or asking the Mormons, who keep such records.

Another site is *DonorSiblingRegistry.com*, which matches donor children with their siblings. Also there's www.look4them.org, the joint website of 9 organisations, including the Salvation Army, the British Red Cross, and the National Missing Persons Helpline.

Sure Start Flop?

The Guardian says that the government's flagship Sure Start programme has not delivered results. Sure Start costs £3 billion, and £20 million is being spent evaluating it. (To put this sum in context, Cafcass has an operating deficit of £4 million).

Sure Start began with 524 centres in 2001, and is planned to expand to 3,500, one in every neighbourhood, by 2010. So far, it has been targeted at under-privileged children below 5 years old and is meant to supply joined-up early years services, including high quality child-care, parenting classes, training to help "mothers" (sic) into work, health advice and other programmes.

Researchers compared 19,000 under-fives, half in Sure Start areas, half out. And, oops, there was no discernible difference in development, language or behaviour.

But it's "too early to tell" said Polly Toynbee in the same paper. Polly is a close mate of Margaret Hodge, who introduced the policy, and has written many column inches of uncritical praise about it.

Head Start in the US, points out Polly, showed that for every \$1 spent, \$7 was saved by the time the children were 30, in fewer crimes, mental health problems and so on.

And there was one positive outcome in the UK programme. Sure Start mothers give "warmer parenting" with less hostility, smacking, less negative criticism and more affection. And what about Sure Start fathers? As is usual, Polly doesn't say.

McDads? No such thing

McDonald's has a Mums' Panel made up of "mums from all over the country chosen for their wide-ranging views on children's lifestyles..."

Meanwhile frozen goods emporium Iceland has delivery trucks which cross the country with the slogan "Because Mums are heroes".

Fathers at FNF wouldn't dispute the heroism of mums. We just don't like to be left out by insensitive corporations.

Child abuse, says NSPCC

research by senior research officer Susan Creighton (1992), is perpetrated in over 75% of cases by parents, and an additional 10% were other family. 62% of perpetrators were female.

Children were "At greater risk with either mother only, or mother and father substitute."

"Natural mothers were recorded as the perpetrator most frequently for the physical injury, emotional abuse, neglect and 'N & P' (neglect and physical abuse cases)."

(continued on page 15)

McKenzie

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WINTER 2005
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