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Common threads

A numbing experience

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for publishing the recent series of articles on the 19th Judicial Circuit Family Court. Please allow me to express my personal gratitude to the brave women who have stepped forward to tell their stories and The News Sun staff for listening, researching and reporting the issues.

Mothers face criticism, scorn and scrutiny each time they speak up about the injustices they experience in family court. Opponents are contacted to tell their side of the story, and mothers have to defend themselves for the umpteenth time over false allegations, exaggerations and character assassinations.

They are forced to relive sordid details of years of litigation, separation from their children, and concern over the children's emotional and physical well being.

On May 12, yet another Lake County mother lost custody of her children. She had been a stay-at-home mom and primary caregiver for her children. She was a good mother and never was charged with abuse or neglect.

Her husband, however, was emotionally, verbally and physically abusive. When she left him, he told her he would destroy her and take the kids. That's exactly what he did. The court-appointed evaluator recommended sole custody for the father without supporting evidence.

I wish I could offer an explanation for why so many good mothers — women who have never been found to be guilty of abuse, neglect, substance abuse, domestic violence, or any condition that would represent a threat to the well-being of their children — are losing custody. More importantly, I wish we could eliminate the injustice.

I can, from my conversations with many mothers, see common threads. The trouble begins when a woman leaves an emotionally, if not physically, abusive relationship. Many suffered threats from husbands to take custody if they ever leave.


Many are financially dependent on their husbands. Most do not have independent financial means for a custody trial.

In my opinion, court-approved evaluators in the 19th District are prejudiced against women who claim to be victims of domestic violence. In fact, this prejudice is so prevalent that two attorneys (one of whom serves as a GAL in the 19th Circuit) and one court-approved evaluator told me the same thing: "Do not mention abuse." One attorney threatened not to represent me if I mentioned abuse.

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In my case, the court-appointed evaluator costs less than \$4,000, split between spouses. An independent evaluator charged \$17,000 for interviewing both sides and wanted an additional \$4,500 retainer to testify in court. This hardly levels the playing field.

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One of the biggest problems with the family court system is that evaluators are not held to the same evidentiary rules that apply in a court of law. They make recommendations based on information that would never be admissible as evidence, such as hearsay and unsupported allegations.

Thank you again for bringing this issue to light. I am in favor of legislative initiatives to change the way custody cases are determined in Illinois. The problem is the system itself.

Carroll White
Wadsworth

A numbing experience

I hear so many Winthrop Harbor residents complaining about Onyx that I feel compelled to share with you my adventure with our garbage collectors, or should I use a newer term, environment recyclers.

We receive our garbage service on Fridays in Winthrop Harbor, which includes recycling service and yard waste pick up. Onyx encourages all of us to put our garbage, recyclables and yard wastes out the evening before the scheduled pick up.

Now, as a responsible resident, I followed their recommendations very carefully. Can't miss the garbage truck now can we?

As usual they picked up the garbage as scheduled on Friday morning. Little early, woke me up, but never mind. I know they have a tough schedule to meet. I guess it beats the dog jumping in bed and licking you in the face to wake you up.

Anyway, coffee was on so I got out of bed, had my coffee, shook the sleep from my eyes and started a new day. As I drove out of my driveway I noticed my yard waste still sitting by the road. I just figured, with all the rain, (as it was raining), he was probably taking a little break, waiting for a break in the weather. No problem, who wants to work in the rain, right?

Later that day, I happen to notice my yard waste was still by the road. I looked to the sky, no rain. I wondered did they miss me? Did I forget to put the stickers on the bags?

So I double checked the bags. Yep, stickers on. Maybe this was the wrong day for yard waste?

I called Village Hall. Yep, right day. I looked down the street. My neighbors' yard waste was in front of their house.

So I thought maybe I should call Onyx. Yep, that's what I could do. Maybe they got a driver missing. These days you never know.

Maybe he was abducted? I thought, yes, my civic duty would be to call and report this. Who knows, we might have to go on Amber alert to find a missing