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Secretary:

Forbes, Bev (REPS)

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 29 October 2003 2:25 PM
To: Committee, FCA (REPS)
Subject: coffs harbor public hearing

attention the standing committee for the public hearing at Coffs Harbor,

I attended the public hearing into child custody arrangements at coffs harbor on 27th October and spoke as an individual witness at the end of the proceedings. As I didn't prepare a written statement to read out I think my speech was a little garbled, so I would like to enter this written submission of my views to the committee which will hopefully be more coherent and won't find me blubbering in the middle of it.

30 OCT 2003

Firstly, I would like to comment on the fact that there was no child care available for this hearing. I believe single mothers were poorly represented at this hearing, and probably at all your public hearings, because they were unable to get there, as they had small children at home to care for. I had five friends who wanted to attend this hearing but they were unable to because of their children. I would also question whether single mothers views are also being underrepresented in this enquiry as a whole as they simply do not have the time to take part after their commitments at home. The only reason I could attend the hearing and write this submission is that I have the support of my extended family. Most single mothers in this society would not have that option. I cannot see how this is a fair enquiry representing all parties when child care is not included.

I am a forty year old woman whose parents separated when I was five or six years old. I am able, now, to look back on my feelings as a child with some equilibrium and understanding. My and my sisters overwhelming desire as young children was to be with our mother. I loved my father very much, but I would not have wanted to spend fifty percent of the year with him. He asked us many times if we would like to live with him, but we just wanted to stay with mum. We spent six weeks at Christmas with him and two more weeks at another time of the year, there was the opportunity to spend more time with him, but this was quite sufficient for us as young children. I would like to have spent more time with him as an older teenager (17-18 years old), when I felt more secure, certainly as a young adult and up to the present, but sadly he died when I was fifteen. I miss him very much, but this does not alter my feelings about wanting to stay with mum when I was younger. I was very aware of Dad's grief when we would leave him, how much he wanted us to stay and how much he missed us, and it would leave me feeling very sad, but my need for a stable home with mum and my sister was greater.

I think the most important thing for me in my relationship with my father, and the greatest gift he gave me, was knowing I was loved by him. The letters he sent and the phone calls he made were very important to me, and though I didn't respond to them often, it did not mean I didn't welcome them. That confirmation of his love has made me a much more stable person today and I wish I had the opportunity to know him as an adult. There are so many times in my life as an adult that I wish he was there to talk to. My relationship with him is more important to me as an adult than it was as a child. As a child I was very needful of my mother.

My concern with the concept of parents having a 50/50 split of the children is that it may be in the parents best interests, but not the children's. If it had been written in law that Dad could have had us 50% of the year I'm sure he would have seen it as the best thing for us and taken that option. That would have been so distressing for me, to have to leave my mother for such an extended period of time. Parents fighting and breaking up is very disturbing and you need as much stability in your environment as you can

get after so much disaster. I know the fathers are often left aching with the loss of their children, and I could hear that pain at the public hearing, but they do continue to be their childrens' father throughout the whole of their childrens' lives, and though the loss in the shorter term is great for those fathers, there will be many years ahead where their children will want and need their love. Surely the most important thing for a young child is stability and security in a familiar environment. I think the most important thing fathers can give their children is the knowledge of their love for their child, as many times as possible.

I now have a daughter of my own. Sadly her father walked away during my pregnancy and showed scant regard for my well being, nor the babies, throughout my pregnancy, making giving birth a very traumatic event for me and causing most of my hair to fall out from stress. He visited her a few times as a baby but had little awareness of how to treat a baby and would do things like wake her up when I'd just got her to sleep because he wanted to say hello to her. What is the enquiries attitude to cases like this? Could he, under this new law, gain fifty percent access to her? She is now four years old and the last time she saw him she was only five months old. She doesn't remember him at all. She has a loving extended family of aunties, uncles, nana and cousins who all adore her. She calls one of her uncles, who she has a wonderful bond with and who has been there for her since her birth, 'daddy', fully understanding that he is her uncle and that she does have a father. She asked if she could call her uncle 'daddy' when she was two years old and we agreed as a family that this was fine. How traumatic for my child would it be, to be removed from her family environment into an environment where she knows know one, just because this man is her father and can demand fifty percent of her time should the whim take him? How do you intend to legislate for cases such as these?

I would love to have the opportunity to speak more on this subject to the committee as I have had so much experience of broken families and the different effects it can have on children. Most of my friends at school and after woods are from broken families, I think we tend to attract each other because we understand what the other has been through. My elder brothers and sister also lost their father. If this is possible I can be contacted at the above address.

I would like to finish by reiterating that children can never be reminded enough that they are loved by both parents and that this is perhaps more important than the amount of time spent between parents, and that if either parent is not a part of the child's life for what ever reason, that they are loved and supported by other members of their family as much as possible.

thank you for your time,
yours sincerely,
