

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs	
Submission No:	983
Date Received:	5-8-03
Secretary:	

Dear Sir/madam

I wish to make a submission for this enquiry.

I am sure there will be many arguments on different positions from different interest groups. And while I could take a stand also, what I wish to convey instead is a personal circumstance on how the current arrangements have forced me to make a decision that while is in the best interest of the child, was in the end the worst decision for every-one else involved.

I separated from my wife and four young children 12 years ago. At the time I did have unofficial custody of the children, but on talking things over with my wife, we decided to transfer the children over to her care. We initially decided on joint custody, that is equal time to share the children. But this was discouraged by councillors in the family court, as well as Social Workers in the State Government. Before long a lawyer was involved on behalf of my wife and the idea was scuttled by him. The final blow was when I was told by the Family Court that even if we had agreed on joint custody, they would actively discourage it, and even find against it. It was not their policy to grant joint custody as they believed it didn't work.

All in all it was actively discouraged by all professionals involved in these matters.

As a child I have seen the effect of visits from relatives who turn up once in a while, compared to "close relatives", who were involved in every aspect of your upbringing. The visiting relatives just gave you a gift, spent a few hours with you and left. And as a child they were treated as nothing more but as a stranger. I also saw this when my parents separated, with my father nothing more than "a visitor" to my younger brothers and sisters. Its not a good role model to look up to, and conveys all the wrong moral messages, such as "a gift repairs everything, even love."

I wanted to be involved in the upbringing of my children, but the system instead designated me nothing more than a weekend father, with visiting rights. This was not suitable to me personally, and more importantly, I believed harmed the long term prospects of my children. I took the hardest decision of my life. Its often said, "if you really love some-one, LET THEM GO". That is what I did. I decided in the best interest of the children that their father should be effectively dead, that is I decided on no contact. The children could then get on with their lives, and not be torn between a week-end father that wasn't really a father, but more a distant relative that visited occasionally with presents.

I know of many who could not understand this decision, or think its wrong. But many others state they have done the same thing, and that generations of children grew up fine after their fathers were killed in the various wars last century. I have not wavered from this stance, and have not made any attempt to contact my children in all this time. Its for the betterment of the children I have taken this stance. A hard but just stance. But it is also true they have suffered being in the environment of a single parent.

The point of this submission is that there may be no better system for the children, on the other hand their may well be if people were to open their eyes. But the current system has big drawbacks, and I wanted the community to see one of them.

I believe in all honesty that if the system had granted joint custody, all parties would have been happy. More importantly, the children would have been far more well adjusted than they are now, and have many more opportunities than what they are likely to have. It is true I believe the children mentally are better off thinking their father is effectively "dead", but they have suffered with a lower standard of living, and thus less opportunities that go with that situation. But weighing up the pros and cons of my action, I believe they are in general better off without a week-end father, as at least they can get on with their lives from a very young age.

It's a pity I was not able to be there to experience it, or advance their standard of living. But "such is life".

A personal viewpoint from

[REDACTED]