

Why Do They Do it?



By: Nancy Larkin Taylor
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Having two similar custody situations in one week does not necessarily make a pattern. But their side to side appearance does suggest a theme. I am the first one to blast the use of stereotypes as the product of non-discriminating observation and facile conclusion. But the similarities in a few doctor custody cases give me pause.

The first is an old song; a couple marries right out of college, both from blue-collar families. She works while he's in medical school, does his residency and completes his internship. In a flash, they have three beautiful boys. He has a successful cardiac practice and they are living the good life.

She's a full time mom, taking the boys to soccer and the orthodontist, remembering his relatives' birthdays. But they grow apart. His eyes glaze when she talks about her volunteer work and he feels he's just a source of paychecks. He hooks up with his pretty office manager and before you can say medical convention in Puerto Vallarta, she has the house and he's eating Stouffers in an apartment near the hospital.

Their divorce is long, bitter and expensive. He folds finally, after she hires her third attorney who starts the third audit. He agrees to pay for private high school and college. The boys are 9, 14 and 16 when the divorce is over.

At home, when Dad's name is mentioned, it's a curse. The boys don't know the name of his dog. They don't know his cell phone number and they would never dream of calling on Father's Day.

One afternoon, as Dad quietly watched his youngest play soccer at the ritzy private school, the boy pitched enough of a fit to prompt his coach to order Dad off the field. That was 1999, the last time Dad saw any of his sons. He was not invited to any graduations. Now they are 22, 27 and 29. Mom still lives in the big house.

In the aftermath of doctor divorce number two, a troubled 14-year-old refuses to talk to her Dad. On their mandatory Wednesday dinner visit at ChiChis, she either hides in the ladies room or sits with her forehead resting on the table.

The anger on her father's face barely conceals the deep pain underneath. The daughter has not seen her paternal grandmother in years, didn't go to Uncle Harry's funeral and would not recognize her first cousin if he sat next to her on the R5.

Dad pays for her twice-weekly gymnastic lessons, but is forbidden to set foot in the auditorium during the district competition. The only time they see each other, besides the pleasant Wednesday dinners, is during the one hour court ordered therapist sessions on Saturday mornings, when daughter tells him how much she hates him. Mom refuses to participate, as it's "his problem." She insists that Dad pays for daughter's cab fare to and from the appointments as the girl refuses to get in Dad's car and Mom won't drive her.

Even for caring, responsible co parents, post divorce adjustment is difficult. Most divorced parents quietly resume their re arranged lives, coping with dark humor and a thick skin. Flexibility is key. A canoe trip planned months in advance is scratched

because the ex's work schedule suddenly changed. Vacation weeks are switched last minute due to a family reunion in Ohio

Minor annoyances are overlooked as daily routines take form in the new households. Most kids are raised with intelligence and cooperation by the formerly marrieds. But these are not the cases on my radar screen this week.

The two doctor cases are solar systems away from the normal five year post divorce scenario when the dust has usually settled. It makes me wonder why doctors' divorces can be so off the chart.

When I asked one doctor's second wife, she explained that when doctor's wives walk down the aisle, they have expectations of never again working, an early and easy retirement and the full status of their position till death do them part. The reality of a marriage gone south shatters that dream. He is the one responsible.

Some doctor's wives, she says, are doctor's daughters and carry entitlement to the "life" in their genes. Others, as in case one, have climbed the social ladder and resent the descent.

Or, their replacement with a younger version is too much. Remember Betty Broderick, the mild mannered suburban mom of four who blew away her ex and his new wife while they slept in their townhouse overlooking the harbor? Perhaps it is simply that these folks are blessed with enough money to fight the good fight. It's a mystery to me.

I do know that after the money issues are over, these ex wives' *raison d'être* is to poison the kids against Dad to the point where they are disloyal if they make any contact with him or his side of the family. I don't know how they do it, but I know of too many cases where they have been very successful.

So I try to remind myself to tell my clients, when they

are fighting over where the proceeds of the home equity loan went seven years ago, to fast forward five years and envision their future co-parenting scheme. Don't lose sight of the big picture and remember what is at stake.

Nancy Larkin Taylor is a familiar figure in Bucks and Montgomery County where she has been practicing family law for many years.

Mrs. Taylor firmly believes that if our divorce, support and custody systems are ever going to improve, it will occur when parties and parents work together to achieve joint goals.

Those goals include striving for custodial arrangements that meet their childrens' best interests & full financial disclosure which leads to a fair and quick resolution of economic issue so that fissures created in divorce do not last a lifetime.

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