

Single Parent Times

Volume 1, Issue 1

Helping Single Parents in North Carolina

Summer 2003

Welcome to the First Edition of the *Single Parent Times!* by Montie Roland

Welcome to the first edition of the *Single Parent Times*, sponsored by NCSingleParent.com, which is dedicated to providing single parents with information and resources to help them meet the challenges they face each day.

When my marriage ended, it was the most traumatic event in my life. I've been very blessed to have made lasting friendships through the single parents' group at Colonial Baptist and the local chapter of Parents Without Partners. A life long friend, Sean, was also there for me again and again. Those friendships were critical for me to be able to stabilize my life and begin to heal. It was also during this time,

that I realized just how precious my daily relationship with God really is. Grace is what I need and is exactly what I have received through Jesus.

Divorce leaves incredibly deep

"It's a huge blessing to have a family law attorney participating on a regular basis in the legal issues forum"

scars, but as I keep telling my girls (ages 5 and 9), "we just have to make the best of the situation." All around us are single parents trying to do

just that. Single parents come from a variety of backgrounds and have similar needs for support.

Forums on the web site allow single parents and other experts to discuss issues relevant to the day-to-day life of a single parent. For example, the Legal Issues forum is specifically aimed at legal issues unique to single parents. It's a huge blessing to have a family law attorney participating on a regular basis in the legal issues forum. Steve has really done a great job answering questions posed by forum participants.

Feel free to e-mail me at montie@montie.com with any suggestions or comments.

Single...With Children by Christine Myers

I'm probably not much different than many women born at the tail end of the baby boom generation. We all watched the Brady Bunch on T.V. in prime time and had not-so-secret crushes on the current heart throb in

Tiger Beat Magazine. We bought top ten 45's with our allowance that we played on our stereos with that little plastic disc in the center. Microwave ovens, cell phones, VCRs, CD players, DVDs, and Tivo were the stuff of

science fiction. And we all played with Barbie. Good old Barbie. Summer Splendor Barbie, Winter Wonderland Barbie, Cowgirl Barbie... the possibilities were endless. With

(Continued on page 2)

The Attorney as a Litigation Consultant by Steve Monks

In a perfect world, two mature adult parents would discuss their disagreements concerning their children and resolve them without the need for the courts. We do not live in a perfect world. Single parents frequently find themselves having to turn to the courts for recourse for problems they are experiencing with their children's other parent, fre-

quently referred herein as "the opponent".

All too often, single parents cannot afford the legal fees which are generally associated with turning to the courts for help. I believe many attorneys genuinely feel bad that attorney's fees are as high as they are and they wish they could/would charge less. How can single parents

afford the legal fees?

There are several options. First, there are many insurance plans which provide some legal services for "regular people". The most notable are: Pre-Paid Legal, Inc., Lawstar and US Legal Services, Inc. Basically, the insured pays a monthly fee in order to have access to attorneys

(Continued on page 3)

Single... With Children

(Continued from page 1)

that box of naked dolls, shoes without matches, and clothes all askew we could turn her, and thus ourselves, into anything we wanted her to be. We all dreamed of one day meeting the man of our dreams (a.k.a. 'Ken'), getting married, and living oh-so-happily-ever-after.

My score is two out of three. At 40-years-of-age and after over ten years of marriage I find myself divorced with two children. It turns out my 'Ken' wasn't the man of my dreams. Our marriage didn't fail through lack of effort. Several years of marriage counseling wasn't enough to bridge the problems in our marriage so we made the incredibly difficult decision to part ways. That decision is hard enough in and of itself. When you have children who depend on you to keep their world secure that difficulty level is infinitely multiplied.

My two children could not be more different if they tried. My oldest daughter is convinced that a grave mistake was made on the day of her birth; she was supposed to be born into a very wealthy family complete with maid, chauffeur, butler, and controlling interest in the local shopping mall. She wants the best of the best. The newer the better and – excuse me? – make sure that designer label is well in sight, thank you. Her tastes run high while our budget is low. No matter how hard I try to get her to count her blessings, her glass is always half empty. Despite my best efforts I have no doubt that she will be the one who someday gives her engagement ring back because it's simply not big enough. My youngest daughter is her arch nemesis. She's thrilled with the simple things in life. She's happy with any gift and her heart is as big as the Grand Canyon. When she was little she cried when she saw an ambulance because she knew that someone was hurt and that would make their mommy sad. She tries to find the good in everything and every-

one and only wants everyone to get along. My biggest fear is that some day she will join the Peace Corps and take herself off to the other side of the earth. Still, they're happy, healthy (knock wood!), well-adjusted little women. Giggling is the norm. Sibling rivalry over who's put together the best outfit reigns supreme. Fashion is a passion as are boys, AOL instant messaging (the proper "I'm away" message is imperative), screaming when very excited or very, very scared, and chocolate. Our house is churning mass of estrogen. We're a family. We're a team. And we're happy.

Today my girls and I are living in a world foreign to what we were used to. Our budget is small and barely covers the basics. Dance lessons and the like are a thing of the past. Luxuries are few and far between. My girls have been forced to learn how to plan so that what they need is at Mom's or Dad's house on the right day. They're better at juggling schedules and possessions than any CEO. They're doing well in school, have multitudes of friends, and are more precious to me than life itself.

For all the signs they are happy, well-adjusted, and thriving, I still worry. I'm a firm believer that when a marriage is unhealthy the whole family suffers. At the end, my ex-husband and I were strangers merely co-existing under the same roof. While we didn't fight, we didn't communicate either – good or bad. I know that situation wasn't doing my girls any favors. Still, did making that break harm them? Have I permanently scarred them? Will they grow into women who find it difficult to form lasting relationships or a strong marriage? With all the media hype there is today about the consequences of divorce (thank you, Oprah) I can't help but wonder if my children will look at my decision as a selfish one. I've tried very hard to show them that difficult, painful decisions have to be made sometimes but that with hard work

the end result can be a positive one. I've emerged on the other side of divorce a far happier, healthier, stronger, and more confident person. Still, when I add in all the factors and variables, I sometimes find myself on the superhighway to Stressville, Guiltville, and all points in between.

Not long after my ex-husband moved out, I went in search of a group called Parents Without Partners. I had heard of them before and thought, surely, if anyone knew what I was going through it would be them. I did a web search and found that there was actually a group right in my area. I called the number, found out when the next new member orientation was going to be, and took myself off to the meeting – not without some apprehension. For anyone who has divorced, those early days are very hard. Most of your friends tend to be married. You find yourself no longer a part of that clique. You're the odd one out, the fifth wheel. I had no idea what I would find when I walked into that first orientation; I was hopeful yet nervous, awkward, self-conscious, and scared out of my mind.

What I found was a caring group of people just like me. Parents Without Partners (PWP) is an international, non-profit organization dedicated to the needs of single parents and their families. Whether divorced, widowed, separated, or never married, the one thing that binds the group is that we are all single parents. Quite simply, I found a home. It's a place where I wasn't the fifth wheel. A place where my situation was immediately understood and my concerns and worries were taken seriously. I no longer felt like there was something wrong with me. Here was an entire group of people who were living my life – successful, happy, friendly, compassionate people – who welcomed me with open arms.

It has been three years since I walked into that first meeting. Today I'm President of the Capital Area Chapter of Parents Without

(Continued on page 4)

The Attorney as a Litigation Consultant

(Continued from page 1)

by phone to answer legal questions, prepare simple wills, assist with traffic tickets, etc. Generally, these plans do not provide for family law litigation, but rather, the insured is referred to attorneys who provide legal services at discount rates of 25% to 50%. Generally, these are good plans and they deserve your consideration. Unfortunately, most of the plans do not let you pick your own attorney. However, if you cannot afford these plans or you feel up to it, do it yourself with a lawyer's help. This is called representing yourself pro se. I call it ghost writing when I provide this service to clients.

Family law can be complicated and I do not recommend pro se representation lightly. But, there are some cases which are more conducive to being handled without an attorney than others and occasionally, not having an attorney that you are paying hourly, can give you a negotiating advantage. Let me explain.

Representing yourself pro se would typically not be advisable in cases involving serious allegations of sexual or physical abuse because it may be too much of a strain to have to deal with those emotional issues and effectively attend to the court proceeding. This is why many family law attorneys hire other lawyers to represent them in family law court.

Keep in mind that most cases, even the nasty ones, are settled without having a trial. Most courts mandate mediation in custody cases. Once you know what to expect in mediation and what to ask for, you can generally handle that

yourself. Child support is typically just a mathematics equation. Again, the key is knowing what to ask for and what to expect. Recently, I have found that courts to be accommodating to the unknowledgeable pro se litigant. Your opponent may initially feel they have an advantage because they have the "high priced gun". But, that advantage soon fades away after they have paid thousands of dollars and they have

"This scenario works best when your attorney has advised you that you have little hope of winning but you are not ready to give up the fight"

not achieved their desired result. I find that what most people need is someone to guide them through the process.

Most attorneys do like helping people. Let your attorney help you. Let them prepare you for mediation. Let them draft your legal documents for your signature. Pay them to attend court to "assist you" if you can afford it. Pay them to take your phone calls when your opponent calls and tells you something crazy for which you must have an answer.

You may be able to negotiate a lower hourly rate since the attorney will not be going to court. This scenario works best when your attorney has advised you that you have little hope of winning but you are not ready to "give up the fight" or you just want a little better deal than your opponent is offering. Proceeding without an attorney when your opponent is paying for one generally increases your negotiating position because the opponent's attorney is advising their client that they can pay big bucks to win this case or they can cut a deal with you. The opponent quickly determines that they cannot "spend" you into submission. It is important to know exactly what you want and what a good deal is. That is where your "ghost writing" attorney becomes very helpful.

A significant downside to pro se representation may be the obligation to pay the opponent's attorneys fees. In addition, some judges treat pro se litigants harshly which may result in a bigger loss than would have otherwise occurred. These issues can, and should, be discussed with your attorney in the initial consultation.

No one will ever know the case better than you. Few people will ever care more about the outcome. Again, I do not recommend pro se representation lightly but hiring an attorney as a "consultant" instead of a "litigator" can be done and does have some advantages.

R.S. (Steve) Monks is an attorney and counselor at law specializing in family law and can be reached by phone at 919-451-7979 or by e-mail at rsmonkslaw@nc.rr.com.

Sunday School Class Just for Single Parents begins July 13, 9:30 am at Colonial Baptist Church in Cary, NC. This class is led by Dale and Sylvia McCoy. The class allows single parents to study and fellowship together. The class is designed to encourage single parents to build bridges to other families at Colonial while addressing their immediate felt needs. For more information about the class, contact Dale and Sylvia McCoy at 460-0250 or dmccoy@mindspring.com. For more information about Colonial, visit www.colonial.org.

Single Parent Times

Helping Single Parents in North Carolina
A Publication of NCSingleParent.com
500 Old Apex Rd.
Cary, NC 27513

Montie Roland, Editor
Phone: 919-481-1845
Fax: 919-380-1450
Email: montie@ncsingleparent.com

Copyright © 2003, Montie Design

Single...With Children

(Continued from page 2)

Partners, Inc., proudly serving the Raleigh area of North Carolina. Serving as chapter president is my way of giving back to this wonderful organization. I know it sounds clichéd but I honestly don't know where I would be today if I hadn't found this incredible group of people. I've made friends that I know I will have for life. This group helped me find my way through the minefield of divorce. There was always someone I could ask for advice, always someone to help fill those long days when my children were with their Dad, always someone simply to chat with about anything and nothing. I've found friends who are also rabid hockey fans (Go Canes!), friends who share my passion for leisurely Sunday afternoons sharing the Sunday paper over coffee, and friends who make me laugh no matter how hard my day has been.

More importantly, my children have had the opportunity to see that they are not alone. They've met other children in the same situation as them. They see that our situation is not unique and that we will not only survive, we'll succeed with flying colors! Each month every PWP chapter prints a monthly newsletter with a calendar of activities. Some activities are for parents only, some are family activities for parents and their children. My children look forward to the monthly calendar of events almost as much as I do and can't wait to circle the things they want to do.

Some of our members have been single parents for some time, some are newly separated and learning to adjust. Now when a new member comes to their first meeting looking a little nervous, I'm one of the people who welcomes them and helps set their minds at ease. The cycle

has come full circle. If you're interested in finding a chapter of Parents Without Partners, just go to www.parentswithoutpartners.org and search for a chapter in your area. If you live in the Triangle area, go to www.capitalareapwp.org to find out when our next new member orientation is. You'll find a caring group of people navigating the difficult obstacle course of single parenting just like yourself. Grab a seat, settle in, and have some fun. We'd love to meet you... and welcome home.

Christine Myers is the President of Capital Area Chapter of Parents Without Partners, Inc. You can reach Christine by voice mail at 919-547-4466.

For more articles and information visit:

www.NCSingleParent.com