

NICOLE REVISITED

In re-reading the above articles, I again emphasize that the vast majority of DCF workers are good to excellent, doing a difficult and thankless job which is often dangerous. They are further subject to criticism by newspaper columnists and editorialists who in most cases are totally ignorant of Juvenile law, and whose main job is to sell newspapers. Nonetheless, there are poor workers, and there are always bureaucratic pressures.

It is not easy to be a social worker. Very often, clients will promise to stay off drugs, stop fighting with their partners in front of the children, and cooperate with therapists. Then the client doesn't cooperate, blames others, and repeatedly gets in the face of the worker. Some clients are beyond help. Some will argue, refuse to accept responsibility, and frustrate you every step of the way. After you see enough of this, it is easy to get cynical.

DCF often provides the necessary impetus to get parents who are lazy or disorganized to do what they have to do, for the welfare of their kids. In one case, the father, who had custody, was simply slow to get the child to the doctor for his medical needs. After DCF got involved, the father moved along a little faster, and even admitted that he needed the push. DCF did a great job with this client, the child was well served, and the case was shortly closed.

Nevertheless, many clients are wrongfully accused, and many have their reunification delayed for totally unnecessary reasons. The point is not to compare stories, and argue good vs. bad, but to emphasize that some workers are better than others. And the best defense remains: hire a qualified lawyer early on, and cooperate with that lawyer.

Do not wait as long as poor Nicole did.

No web site like this, of course, is ever complete. There are many other stories, some successful, some not. Every day brings new twists. Trying to help people is gratifying; losing is never pleasant. It is even more unpleasant for those who lose.

But certain incidents do make courtroom life worthwhile. In 2004, my fiancée and I went to a surprise 40th anniversary party for a friend at a restaurant. A young waitress came up to us and asked if I had worked in the Rockville Juvenile Court. I said yes, although I had no memory of her (this unfortunately happens as you get older). She told me that she remembered me. When she was arrested as a teenage delinquent, about eight years earlier, she was truant, using drugs, and involved with boys. I was assigned as her court-appointed lawyer. I had spoken to her, encouraged her to do well, and met with her family. I told her that I believed in her and offered my help whenever she needed it. She did call from time to time.

Now she has a kid, was putting herself through school, and had two jobs. She was respectable and happy. She said that she never forget what I had told her, even though I myself had long since forgotten it.

If there are law students or beginning lawyers out there who are looking to help people, and who don't want bureaucratic jobs - believe me, there are plenty of opportunities.

But you have to really want to handle them.

Bureaucracy is the scourge of our time. It is nothing more than organized, socially-acceptable irresponsibility. It is the embodiment of a "you scratch my back, I'll scratch your back" culture. If you understand that bureaucracy is the vehicle by which frightened people with no self-respect

try to ensure their own economic security, then you understand how the world works. And if you understand it, you can deal with it.

It is not a mystery.

In 2007, DCF, which has enough to do, is trying to get approval to do "studies" on whether or not its actions impact minority groups too extensively. All this does is to keep DCF visible to the Legislature, and waste public money, while taking valuable resources away from the serious business of protecting innocent children. Not a single qualified business manager in the world would support such idiocy. The costs far outweigh the benefits; in fact, there are no benefits. But in a bureaucratic world, it makes perfect sense.

And in the midst of this, Nicole has lost her child forever.

Many of these articles do illustrate why DCF is so intent on keeping the public and press restricted from access to Juvenile Court. As always, sunshine is the best cure for Government excess; and openness is invariably good policy.