

THE STORY OF BERNARD AND ELIZABETH

By Atty. Michael H. Agranoff

It is possible that some readers of this web site will think that I am paranoid in advising you not to speak to DCF without a lawyer. "What next? Don't go into a package store without calling a liquor lawyer?"

Some will think that I am just trying to use fear to drum up business. And I wouldn't blame them; it's a common advertising technique, and lawyers as a class do not have a stellar reputation.

And yet experience bears out the warning. Just ask Bernard and Elizabeth.

Two little girls, ages 2 years and 4 months, were being taken from their parents. The parents had severe drug and mental health problems, and DCF planned to terminate their parental rights (TPR). By all accounts, the TPR was entirely justified. Meanwhile, the girls would be placed in foster care.

The paternal grandmother (mother of the father of the girls) was frantic. She knew that her brother and his wife were solid people, loved children, had a wonderful home, and might be a placement resource. Her brother's name was Bernard, and she called him with the story.

Bernard had an adult son by a prior marriage. He had recently married Elizabeth, and they had a comfortable home together. They were blue collar people, moderately educated, of high moral integrity, and had many loving relatives and friends.

Elizabeth herself never had children, but she had always babysat for kids of her sisters and friends. In one case, she had practically raised a nephew whose parents had had problems. But by now, it was too late for her to have children of her own.

Bernard discussed the matter with Elizabeth, and they readily agreed to take the girls if DCF would permit it. The DCF worker came out almost immediately, evaluated the home, evaluated the couple, and performed the necessary steps. In a few weeks, the girls were placed with Bernard and Elizabeth. Nothing was official, of course, but it was "clearly understood" that if TPR happened, then the girls would be put up for adoption with Bernard and Elizabeth. This was in October, 2004.

An excellent job by DCF. The system was working.

All went very well. Bernard and Elizabeth were not young. They were in their early 50's. Bernard continued to work, and Elizabeth stayed home with the girls. By all uncontradicted accounts, they were great foster parents to their great-nieces.

Christmas 2004 went well. Too well, perhaps. Elizabeth had a thought and discussed it with Bernard. It was a thought that she must now be regretting bitterly.

Elizabeth thought that since things were going well, and the couple was extraordinarily happy, it would be even better if they could adopt a little boy about the age of the older girl. Bernard agreed. So Elizabeth called DCF and was referred to a social worker.

The social worker told Elizabeth that they did not have a boy, but they had a wonderful little girl. She was Caucasian, healthy, friendly, and doing well in school. Plus, it would just be a

temporary placement. Elizabeth and Bernard, not wanting to appear ungrateful for the opportunity, agreed.

After the child was placed, the couple found out that she was the foster kid from Hell. She had been physically and sexually abused, and was aggressive, disrespectful, mean, and a chronic liar. She was extremely jealous of any attention paid to other children. Yes, she was in therapy, but no one had been able to help her. She had already disrupted at least 5 placements within 2 years. It was sad; this innocent child had been abused, and now needed a therapeutic foster home, and had only a fair chance of success at that.

But the social worker had not been able to find a suitable home. And when Elizabeth called, she must have thought that she had died and gone to Heaven. Here was a golden opportunity to get a problem off her desk, and help clear her in-tray.

Over the months, Elizabeth and Bernard told several DCF workers that the child needed to be placed in a home where she was the only child, and could get the attention she craved. They did not use the term "therapeutic foster home" because they were not aware of it; but DCF was surely aware of it. DCF did ask the couple if they wanted the child removed, but they said no, as they were not quitters and wanted to do the right thing; plus, as they were told, it was "just temporary".

Elizabeth and Bernard received no training whatsoever in dealing with child victims of sexual abuse. Not that it would have matters; even the experts are stumped. They attended two sessions with the child's therapist, and reported that he had absolutely nothing to offer, other than "try this; try that."

Elizabeth and Bernard received sympathy from several DCF workers, but little else. Everyone passed the buck to someone else. The truth, as Elizabeth and Bernard did not realize at the time, was that there was little or no help to give. They were to be the designated scapegoats for the State's failure to help this poor innocent child.

It did not go well. The child was impossible, and Elizabeth spanked her a few times. These were light spankings, and that fact was uncontradicted. Nevertheless, DCF foster parents must sign an agreement that they will do no physical punishment. The child told about the spankings, and there was an investigation.

When DCF investigated, as per usual, they did not tell the parents beforehand that they could have a lawyer present. The parents were scared to death, and made additional comments that they later regretted. **As a result, DCF pulled not only the difficult child, but the two great-nieces from the home; then substantiated the parents for neglect and abuse and recommended them for placement on the Child Abuse Registry.**

It should be noted that the DCF investigation was cursory to the point of absurdity. DCF did not investigate any friends or relatives of the couple, who could (and later did) testify to their worth as foster parents; DCF did not contact the lawyer for the two great-nieces, who could (and later did) testify as to the bond between the girls and the foster parents; DCF did not consider any psychological evaluation of the girls, to see if they had actually been "damaged" by the foster parents, as claimed. DCF, in short, did the minimum, and washed its hands of the matter; with no meaningful consideration of the further disruption caused to these girls.

At this point, the parents called me.

We appealed the substantiations and Registry placement, and had 1-1/2 days of hearings at DCF. In the meantime, DCF, surprisingly, decided to reverse the substantiations against Bernard; but the substantiations and Registry stood against Elizabeth.

DCF did this because it had not a scintilla of evidence that Bernard had done anything wrong. Of course, that did not stop DCF from deciding to put him on the Registry initially. And further, DCF never advised him that he should contact an attorney; knowing that few people are aware of this right in DCF matters.

The hearing now solely concerned Elizabeth. The DCF Hearing Officer rendered the following decision: 4 of the 5 substantiations against Elizabeth were reversed. Only one substantiation remained, and she was taken off the Registry. This was a victory; ten substantiations and two Registry findings, reduced to one substantiation and NO Registry.

But DCF was not through. It filed TPR petitions regarding the two great-nieces. Bernard and Elizabeth tried to intervene in the TPR trial, but their motion was denied, even though the children's attorney went to bat for them. DCF had found decent foster parents who wanted to adopt the girls, and the Court wanted to get the matter over with.

We still did not give up. Elizabeth and Bernard were out of money by now, so I handled the rest of the case pro bono. We pleaded with DCF to allow visitation of Bernard and Elizabeth with the girls; supervised if necessary. The matter was taken to a preliminary hearing in front of another DCF Hearing Officer. That Hearing Officer, fully aware of the facts, stated that she had no jurisdiction to force DCF to allow visitation, given the TPR; but she strongly suggested that they do so.

There is no doubt in my mind that she knew DCF had wronged this couple, and the children.

After a month of promises and nagging, DCF finally pronounced: no visitation; not in the girls' best interests.

And we were done.

What is truly sad is that these fine and decent people simply wanted to adopt their great-nieces, and were well on the road with no opposition whatsoever. They were hoodwinked, by a social worker looking for an easy out, into taking the Child from Hell that they were totally unequipped for. As a result, they are in great danger of never seeing their great-nieces again.

Do you think that Elizabeth regrets making the phone call to get another foster child?

It is easy to argue that Elizabeth was wrong for breaking the spanking covenant. As O'Reilly says: we report, you decide. If ever there were a case where the punishment did not fit the crime, this is it.

In reality, Elizabeth and Bernard presented as uneducated simple people. There is no question that this worked against them. I have seen it time and time again, as have all DCF defense lawyers.

DCF, of course, is entitled to its version of the facts. But it will not present one. It never does.

Should this couple have called me to represent them when things appeared to be going well? when they first noticed that the child was difficult? when they reported problems and received no help from DCF? when the investigator came to the door? Who is to say?

The last e-mail I received from this couple speaks for itself. With names redacted:

We would like to thank you for trying your best. We hate DCF for what they did to us and those two precious babies. They were able to physically take them away from us, but they can never take the memories and love we'll always have for them away from us. It's a terrible, terrible thing that they have the power to do this to people. Again, many thanks for everything you did.

I can't honestly say that their appreciation made me feel any better.

It is interesting that people will tend to believe absolute nonsense, as long as it comes from the mouths of people in authority. It is a rather sad commentary on our education system.

LOUISA

Sometimes, even if things are going well, they can still be made better. Louisa is a single mother of two active and happy children. However, she had a troubled childhood, and took up with some abusive men. Neighbors called DCF, and there was an investigation. A juvenile court petition was filed, and protective supervision was ordered for one year.

Louisa had the kids, but DCF put some very good services into place. Things were going well. However, the DCF social worker visited often, and kept asking Louisa about the boy friend, even though he was long since out of the picture. Louisa sensed that DCF simply did not believe her, and would never let her alone. She feared that protective supervision would be extended, and she called me.

I requested a DCF home visit. It took some time, but we got it arranged. We reviewed all the evidence, and it turned out that Louisa was faithfully attending all of her services and meeting all expectations. Every service provider was happy. There was absolutely no evidence that the boy friend was around. The kids also said that he was not.

We filed a motion to end protective supervision earlier than originally scheduled. I got the kids' lawyer to come out and visit the house and actually see and talk to the kids, which is no mean trick.

In court, DCF half-heartedly opposed the motion, and the kids' lawyer half-heartedly supported it. The judge read our report that all services were going well, the kids were happy, and he ended protective supervision early. Louisa will now be rid of DCF and free to live her life in peace.

A simple matter, and perhaps it would have ended just as well (albeit later) without a lawyer. But perhaps not. Once DCF decides that a woman is involved with undesirable men, it is hard to disabuse them of that notion; it seems to be an organizational bias.

All's well that ends well.

RITA

Rita was, by all objective standards, a pitiful case. Her daughter was born when she was still in high school and the father was not involved. The daughter was removed because Rita was living at home and had accused members of her family of sexual abuse. In addition, there were unexplained marks on the daughter.

Rita, in truth, did not help her own cause. She had learning disabilities. She continued to live at home even after being warned by DCF to leave the home. She was even suspended from school for being in the lavatory with a boy.

Rita was on the fast track to TPR. Her court-appointed lawyer was simply not involved.

Rita's family was devastated. They claimed that there was absolutely no abuse. Later, Rita agreed that she had made up the story; and it is impossible to tell what the truth really was. The family, which loved the granddaughter, was denied visitation; which is positively devastating to grandparents. Rita herself got very little visitation.

The family came to see me. They did not have much money, but we settled on a payment plan; which they have faithfully kept.

DCF had set Rita up with various service providers, including support groups and a therapist. She did not always attend faithfully. We pressured her to go, and she did. We worked with the service providers and passed along their information to DCF. Gradually Rita gained more confidence in herself, got her GED, and was able to hold a job.

Luckily, she had an excellent social worker. We worked well together and continued to encourage Rita. The family was finally granted limited visitation with the granddaughter, after extended efforts, and all went well. Rita's own visitation went well, and the evidence was clear that her daughter was bonded to her.

Rita took parenting classes and got back into the mainstream.

We attended every case status conference and administrative case review. We made certain that the child's lawyer was aware of the situation. We simply refused to allow Rita to fall through the cracks.

The threatened TPR was never filed. Rita is due to get her daughter back shortly.

Suppose this hadn't worked. With any luck, the foster or adoptive family would have permitted Rita to see her daughter, who was clearly bonded to her. But there is no guarantee.

It is absolutely true that TPR is needed in some cases. There are parents who simply cannot be helped. But it is also true that if a parent is given a chance, they will come through in most cases. That chance should include a lawyer who is fighting for their rights.

JENNIFER

Jennifer was a former prostitute and drug addict. She had a child removed. When she got pregnant, DCF had its eye on her.

Jennifer used substances (alcohol and cocaine) during her pregnancy. She did go to a methadone clinic, with limited success. The baby was born suffering from the effects of substance abuse withdrawal, and required constant care.

The baby's father was an illegal immigrant. In addition, there were credible reports of domestic violence, and Jennifer had been involved with abusive men before.

It did not look good. In fact, it could hardly have looked worse. DCF removed the baby under an OTC. However, by one of those unexpected miracles, DCF allowed the baby to remain at the hospital with the mother for a few days, until it got stronger.

Jennifer was certainly on an express train to termination of parental rights (TPR). Her mother looked in the phone book and called me. I went to the hospital on a Saturday morning, and we began to work together. Jennifer's family pledged financial help, and has been faithful ever since.

It was not easy. Jennifer continued to struggle with substances. She denied involvement with the father, but he kept showing up. However, Jennifer was determined to beat the odds.

With the DCF social worker's help, we got Jennifer placed in a special program in Eastern Connecticut. She would live in a group home, get treatment, and eventually the baby could be placed with her for reunification efforts. It helped that Jennifer and I went to all administrative conferences at DCF and kept up the pressure. Also, we had an outstanding social worker. Nevertheless, the DCF goal remained: TPR and adoption.

We would not give up. Slowly, Jennifer straightened out her life. Her mother helped her out considerably.

The Eastern Connecticut program was good, but it did not allow Jennifer the opportunity to work. DCF found another program for Jennifer in Hartford which would help her to get work and would complete the transition. She would still get the needed counseling at the Eastern Connecticut program.

However, the Eastern people objected. They stated that they could not counsel Jennifer properly unless she lived there full time. It was both a Catch-22 and a bureaucratic turf war.

I wrote letters to everyone at the Eastern Connecticut facility and to DCF. We would not let up on this nonsense. Finally, DCF arranged to secure the needed counseling for Jennifer in Hartford.

The baby's lawyer remained uninvolved. As of this writing, the baby is over 16 months old, and the lawyer has never seen him. He has, perforce, never observed the mother and child together. He did say that he would file a motion to revoke the commitment, and then simply neglected to do so.

Interestingly, this lawyer once hosted a Conn. Bar Association class telling lawyers how to deal with DCF. Sorry I had to miss it.

Jennifer continued to get counseling and medication management. When she failed one drug test, we were called in to DCF, and the supervisor read her the riot act – quite properly. The problem stopped.

The baby was returned to Jennifer when he was 10 months old. Jennifer lives with her mother, and things are going reasonably well. DCF continued to visit and provide support. The baby is thriving; and the father has not been a problem. Jennifer is working, getting her GED, and has apparently straightened herself out.

I see Jennifer and the baby, and he is obviously happy and healthy. The case is an enormous personal gratification. The family is grateful, and they continue to pay monthly, in a payment plan amount that they can afford.

Jennifer's shortcomings are obvious, and no one denied them. She needed a chance and got one. It is safe to say that hundreds of people in her shoes got no chance, and had their kids permanently removed, because they tried to fight DCF and other bureaucracies with no help.

Jennifer is the type of case that brings honor to the social work profession also.

HORACE AND SHIRLEY

This is a "Story of Nicole" with a reasonably happy ending. The parents were vindicated after an agonizing struggle, which will no doubt leave lasting scars on them and their children. The case should remind everyone, especially lawyers, of why we have the presumption of innocence in America, even for unpopular characters.

Sadly, the lesson may not take. Because it's Juvenile Court, there will be no movies (like "Hurricane") celebrating the eventual victory of an innocent man.

Horace and Shirley were lower-middle-class parents living in a poor area in Eastern Connecticut. They had three children, ages 5, 1-1/2, and 1 month. One day Horace came home and found the family in crisis. Billy, the 5-year-old, said that the adult neighbor, a family friend, had sexually molested him.

Horace called the police. The neighbor was questioned. Horace was also questioned, as were others. No arrest was made. The families began arguing back and forth, and then an uneasy peace settled on the neighborhood.

A State Police Trooper continued the investigation. He spoke to the parties involved a few more times. He spoke to Billy alone. Finally he said that Billy told him that the father, Horace, was the molester all along.

The Trooper threatened to arrest Horace. DCF was called.

Horace turned out to be a less-than-stellar character. He had served time about ten years earlier for molesting his daughter from a previous marriage. The family was always behind on their rent. They were unattractive and unpopular characters.

DCF removed all three children under an OTC and filed neglect petitions. Horace and Shirley were given separate court-appointed lawyers. They saw the kids an hour a week or so, and Horace's visit was closely supervised.

Meanwhile, Horace was never arrested. There was simply no evidence against him that was enough to convince a prosecutor or a judge that a warrant should be issued. Billy had flatly refused to ever say anything against his father, and no other evidence could be found.

That did not deter DCF, however.

The case proceeded in Juvenile Court. Horace and Shirley had their lawyers, but the lawyers never did anything. DCF had the parents going to various evaluations, and the lawyers never got involved. Meanwhile, the children remained in State care and allegedly got counseling.

Horace continued to maintain his innocence. He would not admit to any wrongdoing. He and Shirley were livid that the neighbor was free, and insisted on their version of what Billy had told them.

DCF pressured Shirley to leave Horace, hinting that she would get the kids back (or at least the two younger ones) if she agreed. She refused to do so. Courageous or foolish; you decide.

Finally, with no agreement, the neglect case was scheduled for trial. When the trial was two weeks away, Horace and Shirley called me.

When Horace and Shirley came in to see me, I reviewed the DCF paperwork and heard their stories. I asked about the upcoming trial.

That's when I was floored.

Shirley's lawyer had refused to meet with her. She did agree to see her **the day before the trial** to go over a few things.

I could not believe it. I asked Shirley what witnesses the lawyer was planning to call, and what evidence she was planning to introduce. Shirley did not know, and reiterated that she had never reviewed the case with her lawyer, but had simply said a few words to her in the courtroom lobby.

I told Shirley that if they lost, DCF would immediately file for termination of their parental rights. What was the lawyer planning to do? Shirley said that's why she called me.

And this was an experienced Juvenile Court lawyer, a former friend of mine who was known to be reasonable and competent. I wrote to her and asked if this were really true. She refused to respond to me. I wrote again. She said that I could call her up to talk if I liked. But she refused to deny that she was planning to go to court "cold".

Of course, no lawyer in the world can possibly prepare for a case like this on one day's notice. Unlike the TV lawyers, there is simply too much to do.

Horace's story was worse. He had also never spoken to his lawyer, except for chitchat in the courthouse lobby. He had never been to the lawyer's office, and the lawyer had never been to his home. Nothing.

Horace also explained that he had not molested his daughter years ago, but was talked into pleading, to avoid a longer prison term, in the course of a domestic dispute with his former wife. He claimed that his daughter, now a young adult, would admit that her mother had coached her. Of course, I had no personal knowledge; but this sort of thing is not unknown to happen.

I asked Horace if the lawyer planned to cross-examine the State Police Trooper. He didn't know. I had if the lawyer planned to review DCF narratives and hit on inconsistencies. He didn't know. I asked if the lawyer planned to call any witnesses. He didn't know. However, the lawyer had **no plans to meet with him**, and the trial was coming up soon.

I wrote to this lawyer also and politely asked if it were true. What was his side?

Two days later, my secretary said to me, "What is the matter with Atty. ---"? It turns out that he called the office, screamed at her, demanded to speak to me, and when she asked the subject, said "He will know" and slammed down the phone.

Undeterred, I wrote another polite letter, explaining that I do not conduct telephone arguments, and asked what his side was. He never responded, and we have never discussed his side. I still see this lawyer in court, and he will grunt at me if we are on the same case, but that's it.

I filed an appearance to represent both parents, and asked for a long postponement in the neglect trial so that I could be prepared. A court hearing was scheduled. The Judge granted the postponement, without anyone objecting. The State, however, objected to my representing both parents.

This is a common DCF trick to make representation less effective. You might think that having two lawyers for the parents instead of one would be more effective. That would be true if they were both in the same office, or both dedicated to working together. However, a court-appointed lawyer is not generally going to work with a privately-retained lawyer in a compatible manner. With different offices, different styles, and different philosophies, two lawyers are useless.

The State's technical rationale is that the parents have adverse interests. After all, mom might get the kids if she left dad. That is true, of course, except that the adverse interests were created by the State itself! However, nothing fazes DCF once its mind is made up.

Good news tentatively. The Judge overruled DCF's objection. I proceeded to prepare for trial, representing both parents.

I won't go through the details, but it took dozens of hours of painstaking work, sifting through documents, writing, requesting, calling witnesses, and trying to get at the truth.

Finally the day of trial came. But it was not to be. A different judge read the papers and said that he would not allow the same lawyer to represent both parents. He used the standard argument stated above. When I reminded him that a previous judge had ruled on the matter, he snarled and said that he would have none of it, and that was that. He appointed a lawyer for the mother, and the case was postponed for several more months.

I got in touch with the new lawyer. He was a decent sort who had won a few tough cases. I thought this might be good news. We e-mailed details, and he agreed to meet me to review the case in detail. Trouble was, we could never agree on a time, and I was getting nervous. Finally we settled on a Saturday, at 11am, nine days before the trial was due to start. We would meet at my office, then located in Stafford.

At 10:45 am that Saturday, he called me. He said, "I didn't realize you were in Stafford. I thought it was Stratford. Anyway, it's too far, and I can't get there. No more time, but I'll see you at the trial."

No, I am not making this up. In Juvenile Law, there is no need to make things up.

We finally got to the actual trial. For all the ballyhoo and seriousness of this case, it was really fairly simple: did the father sexually molest his young son or did he not do so? There were no serious issues of drinking, domestic violence, filthy home, or anything else that would even remotely rise to the level of removing the kids. It all came down to the molestation.

And there remained no evidence. The kid refused to tell his own therapists that his father molested him. There was no physical evidence that the father had molested him. Several character witnesses testified that Horace was a good father who got along with his son.

The Judge refused to allow the now-adult daughter from a prior marriage to testify. He also allowed evidence of that conviction, over my objection, to be mentioned at trial. He allowed a psychologist, over my objection, to testify that Horace met certain criteria for sex offenders. But there was no actual evidence – save for a Connecticut State Trooper who said that the kid admitted it to him.

That was the State's case. This one State Trooper, who apparently knew something that absolutely no one else knew.

When the Trooper was ready to testify, I made my objection. I had written a 10-page brief supporting my objection to that hearsay evidence.

The Judge's response? He was livid. Livid at me for raising the objection at trial, and not in advance in what lawyers call a "Motion in Limine." I told the Judge that I was not going to tip my hand and let the State find a way to circumvent my legitimate objection. The Judge castigated me for "wasting time", as if my client's time, to say nothing of his well-being, had not been wasted.

Later on, I asked several experienced lawyers. All said the same: I was under no obligation to file the Brief ahead of time and tip my hand. Everything in my hearsay objection was proper; I simply took the trouble to also put it in writing. The Judge, in my opinion, was flat-out wrong; although it was obvious to me that his mind was already made up.

The Judge recessed Court until the next morning. He then overruled my objection and let the Trooper give his hearsay testimony of what Billy had allegedly said.

I was absolutely floored. This Judge's bias was so obvious, it wasn't even funny. Most biased Judges, I must say, make a decent effort to hide their feelings, but not this person.

The Judge did not even consider the arguments in my Brief. He used the "residual exception", which essentially states that he can do anything he wants. He said that the Trooper's evidence would be "credible", and therefore should be admitted; after all, this was a Juvenile proceeding, not a Criminal proceeding.

If any lawyer wants a copy of that Brief, please ask for "Horace and Shirley Hearsay Brief", and I will provide a redacted copy.

To make matters worse, Shirley's lawyer, the absentee counsel, argued that she should be free to leave her husband for the sake of the kids. This is not what Shirley wanted, and the lawyer's conduct constituted a grievable offense; but he knew that Shirley was meek and would never complain. And she didn't.

Not surprisingly, all three children were adjudicated neglected. They would remain in State custody, and a TPR trial would be scheduled.

More fun began. I told Horace that I was certain we would win an appeal. However, the money to appeal, and then fight a TPR (which the State was doing regardless) would be overburdening; not to mention that he already owed me over \$20,000.00. Horace responded by calling me a crook, firing me, and then declaring bankruptcy.

I told you he was an unpleasant fellow.

Now Horace got a court-appointed lawyer for the TPR trial. But luckily, he got one of the best.

She told me the results a while ago.

The State presented essentially the same case that it had presented at the neglect trial. A different Judge also allowed the State Trooper to testify. But at the end, the Judge said that there was no evidence against Horace, other than the Trooper, and she simply did not believe the Trooper. The TPR petition was denied.

I would have given anything to be there.

Yes, I knew the Trooper had lied, but I was ashamed to say so. I did not want to believe that a Connecticut State Trooper, a high-prestige law-enforcement official of my beloved State, would do such a thing, especially under oath in a court of law. I had, and continue to have, the greatest respect for the Connecticut State Police. But I caution people to remember that State Troopers can commit crimes also.

As in the O.J. Simpson case, the police officer sincerely believed that the man was guilty, and was not going to let him escape on a technicality.

And it was easy to believe him. He was a fine-looking young man, the very image of a State Trooper. As mentioned earlier, Horace and Shirley were, at best, unattractive characters. We in America have a habit of believing that attractive people are better than unattractive people; they are better adjusted, more honest, better workers, more friendly, and in general just make us feel good to have them around. Erin Brockovitch was a plain-looking woman. To make her seem believable, the producers cast Julia Roberts in the movie. Doris Day played Calamity Jane, one of the homeliest women who ever lived. A rather sad commentary on our educational system.

Back to Horace and Shirley. They won; and the Judge, knowing DCF's bias, crafted detailed orders with frequent in-court reviews to ensure that the children would be returned to them, after an absence of almost **four years**, in an orderly and therapeutically-proper method.

And I never got my 20 grand.

It is really frightening. What if, by the luck of the draw, Horace and Shirley had not gotten a courageous Judge? But nobody cares, and with confidentiality rules, the press will not touch the story. DCF goes on about its business. And you hope that the kids are not too damaged. And if they are – well, don't try to sue the State.

And Atty. Absentee still gets his name in law journals now and then.

And if these folks had called a lawyer when Billy first made his accusations....?