

## Chapter 11 – Castle Keeping

“With what vestige of authority I thought I still had, the castle was kept intact during the months empty of a family. In the end, even it was given-up or given-over for the sake of the children”

Who came up with the saying, “A house is a man’s castle”? Maybe it was knight or warrior, but certainly not the captive locked away in the dungeon. If his house is (or was) his castle, the non-custodial man has long abdicated his apparent position and role as the leader. Being a non-custodial is not honorable or noble—but only degrading and disgusting. The once and former parent becomes increasingly less important or significant in his children’s lives.

The castle was of no consequence to me; I did not care about a piece of property (or brick and mortar). Contrary to the sentiment of Mr. O’Hara (from *Gone with the Wind*), it’s not about the land, but it is about the love that exist between parent and child; and when that love is undermined by both the custodial parent and the court system, the once-parent might as well understand that his authority and his privilege is gone. Yes, it’s all gone; it’s *gone with the wind*.

When my oldest son was young, he liked castles and knights. On several occasions, the kids and I went to medieval festivals from the basic carnival-type to the extravagant, kingdom kind. From his reading in similar books, such as the children’s series of King Arthur, he most likely developed his interest. His room was decorated with a crescent, sword and ball acquired from one of my grandmothers; and his room was his kingdom, and his mind was a place where he could associate the images of the festivals to the words or images of his texts. Whether authentic or real, these medieval times had some degree of honor or nobility about them. Yes, there was clearly evil and mysticism amid the themes, but there was also good and brotherly love working in opposition. In the mind of a child perhaps there was more the regality of the warrior, the chivalry of the knight or some similar “good” found in a quest or kingdom.

When he was even younger, my oldest received a plastic set of armor. The breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, and other accretions resembling that age were probably the first of many influences on his developing interest and intrigue. One other item worth mentioning was a small book that included transparencies of the castle from the moat to the keep. Whenever we visited one of the masonry forts along the southeastern coast (Fort Pulaski and Fort Clinch), he had a frame-of-reference for which to consider the architecture and placements. Maybe too, he took the features of these real structures and used them to bring to life the castles of yore in the books.

As the mind of this child (and all my children) is considered by their father, effort has been made to try to know who they are and how they are doing. The days of living in the home (or castle) are long gone and, by way of the much larger tyrants that tear apart families in wholesale, my children have been indentured to a system that does not care whatsoever for the children. The figurative days of wonderful relationship and the kingdom that we were constructing has given forth to dark, evil, and mystic powers of the courts. **We were free**—not indentured servants of a tyrant.

Shortly after my position was abdicated (or the divorce was final), my ex-wife had a security system installed in our house (her house). On the rare occasion that she compromised the *cardinal rule* and ask me to pick-up my children at my former home, I would consider the security system as like most security systems in cars: it is activated most often through the owner's carelessness. **Why would I burglarize or invade my own home**, my own children, and my once own-family?

I have described the children (and my family) as the greatest single loss of my life. Any one of us can look back in our lives and assess our losses, but ideally, should find solace in knowing that losses enable us to appreciate what we have and sometimes take for granted. I do indeed miss being married and having the companionship and sense of unity that a family offers; but more than that, I regret that love and marriage are not as valued and honored in the present day and, in correlation to that, that husbands and fathers are losing their once-

acknowledged respect and dignity. I am grieved for my children—and boy's in particular—that this *modern age* is emasculating men under the guise of “the best interest of the children”.

Not with might—but **right is the reason for men to continue to challenge this process** whether: as parent fighting international impositions on the family; as a refugee or fugitive of his once-family; or among those fed-up with our culture's effort to eradicate masculinity through such exploits as the medicating of the male-child, the massacre of the developing male by the expulsion and criminalization of his legacy, or the pathetic portrayal of the paternal order in our contemporary media.

We should not have to go very far to read, research, and realize that the beliefs expressed in the last paragraph are very real. On the matter of the “visiting father” of a broken marriage, the following insights from David Blankenhorn in *Fatherless America*:

The visiting father is hard to see. He is a shadow dad, **a displaced man** trying not to become an ex-father. He is a father who has left the premises. He stills stops by, but he does not stay. He is on the outside looking in. No longer the man of the house, **he has been largely de-fathered**. He is a father once-removed. He has becomes a visitor. (148)

As a visitor, he is part father, part stranger. Physical distance, combined estrangement from the children's mother, has radically diminished his paternity. Now a weekend and holiday dad, a treat father, a telephone father, **he is frequently filled with resentment and remorse**. He mourns the loss of his fatherhood much as one would mourn the loss of health.

His effort to be father is “stacked against” him; again, from *Fatherless America*:

The evidence shows that the great majority of visiting fathers are not – Indeed, **cannot be – good-enough fathers to their children**. The deck is stacked against them. Too much has changed, too fast; too much will continue to change [ ] Visiting fathers have lost the bases of the fatherhood.

As to the castle, a “small civilization has died” as David Blankenhorn puts it:

For most divorcing couples, the marriage ends in bitterness, guilt, and pain. **A small civilization has died.** The children stay with the mother. The man moves out and tries to move on. When he does so, he may suffer enormously. He may have the best intentions about not divorcing his children. But despite these feelings, most of these men lose the essence of their fatherhood. They drift away from their children almost as surely as they move away from their former homes [ ] This is sad, but it is the pattern.

It may seem redundant or repetitive to use these references; however, the research and results are very real indeed; and with fading fatherhood being the *greatest social crisis of our time*, deserve to be repeated. The faltering of fatherhood is directly related to the failing of families; the two are inextricably linked in spite of the voices of opposition that have worked ardently to dismantle the mantle of responsibility, duty and obligation of a man to his family.

**The Father’s rights movement** is the product of this “faltering”; it is the collective outcry of the fathers (and their children) as the causalities of court systems in the sense of their devaluing of the father, the bias of the judges, the greed of the attorneys, and the apathy indigenous in the balance of the judicial system. Father’s have been reduced to merely a formality of the offspring to property—that can be taken for no justified or warranted reason.

On several occasions, my ex-wife’s attorney (any one of the five attorneys in five years) would have attested to (or verbalize) “the children’s best interest”.

**Would they be advocating such a claim if not being paid?** Like the slave-runners of the Atlantic (during the 1700 and 1800’s), the attorney’s are facilitating the crisis while skimming their cut from the profits. Sad, but true, that ethics and morals take a distant second for monetary gain or windfall of the dismantled dad.

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**Who is going to accuse the legal system of moral and ethical illegalities?** As my brother once described them as “the long arm”, the courts have no accountability to anyone; thus can impose sentences on defendants without adjudicating a sentence and work collaboratively to meet the quotas on conviction rates—putting justice neatly away on various placards and publications. The father (or man) does not, as one attorney blatantly admitted, “stand a chance”. Oh, and one last comment: don’t try to reason the so-called due-process of the courts; due-process just doesn’t lend well to reasoning or logic.

Quoting from an article in Wikipedia, the once-President of the American Coalition of Fathers and Children, Stephen Baskerville, states that family courts are secretive, censoring and punitive of fathers who criticize them. I go further to say that, even if you have not voiced or published a criticism, the courts are punitive because of what you are—not who you are. He also states that the laws of today (in our “modern” society) represent civil rights’ abuses and intrusive perversion of government power. **Let we forget “the long arm”**.

The female judge (of the divorce) became very defensive when I referred to myself as “the lesser of the two parents”. Why would I describe myself so? Because I was clearly being treated inequitably in the granting of a divorce—because of someone’s admitted unhappiness. If the judge was to grant divorce on this expressed personal matter, wouldn’t it seem equitable to say: “Very well, you want a divorce to find happiness? Pack your personal affects and seek your happiness; but the dad and the children are going to stick around and continue to try to make this family work.” Of course, that’s **not** what the judge did; and what’s more, she spontaneously explained her own plight as a divorced parent. I guess that mixing our personal and professional life is acceptable—even for a judge in session.

To return to Stephen Baskerville and the **Father’s rights movement**, another claim is that our government is engaged in a campaign against fathers and fatherhood. He describes this agenda as being used by the governments **to justify their involvement in the first place**. Now, let me see: the governments

usher in No-fault divorce and, consequently divorce sky-rockets with the majority of cases represented by a female plaintiff. With the burgeoning break-up of families, the governments now institute federal programs to collect child-support from the disparate dads. **Yes, I think he is (or they are) right;** the government has engineered a social crisis to perpetuate their prosperity amid the plight of millions of children. It is like the slave-trade in some sense, where the economics—and not compassion or humanitarianism —is at the root of the problem.

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In what he calls a “cultural sanctioning” or breakdown, David Popenoe describes our changing landscape in his book *Life without Father*.

Today the cultural sanction of male fathering behavior has diminished sharply. Gone are the omnipresent controls provided by close-knit kinship groups in pre-modern societies, groups with enormous stake in the life outcomes of the biological offspring. Disappearing are the religiously based cultural controls, the internalized “virtues” of Victorian society. **Even our laws have gone soft;** instant divorce is now available to men (or women) in most states merely for the asking.

He continues:

Modern cultures are in the process of declaring obsolete the age-old cultural understanding about the importance of fatherhood and the necessity for sanctions against casual paternity. This can be seen most clearly in what has happened to marriage, the key social institution found in every society that has held men to the responsibilities of fatherhood. Not so long ago, America was probably the most marrying society in the world.

In the social crisis of the day is not the removal of the father, but the re-definition of a family. Not only have men been driven from their families like cattle, but the impetus behind this effort has spurred a massive increase of irresponsibility in the form of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and unmarried couples. The divorce rate has stabilized in recent times but, as previously pointed-out, amid a decline in marriage. **What is marriage anyway?** Stay tuned, and the government will establish (or re-establish) this standard like they do life itself; with some arbitrary

basis that makes absolutely no sense to convention, covenant marriage, or Christian concepts.

Within the same chapter, David Popenoe leaves us with an ounce of hope vested in our culture:

While the future of fatherhood looks very grim indeed, the seeds of changes and renewal lie waiting in the invisible but powerful realm called culture—the realm of values, attitudes, and beliefs [ ] There is always the prospect, therefore, that marriage and other cultural guidelines for men can be reclaimed and reinforced.

Where does hope lie? It seems to lie in a change and improvement in our culture. For this improvement to occur, five “propositions” are tendered by David. With each proposition, I provide my commentary and questions.

- 1. Fathers have a unique and irreplaceable role to play in child development.** Statistics show that marriage and family is the best and most-ideal environment for children (and wives) by and large; the conventional family is the safest haven. Why should the destruction of the family continue in such a systematic way if these statistics are verified and validated, and the underpinning of a republic or free society depend a strong family network?
- 2. More than their fathers, children need a committed male and female couple.** Is personal happiness important? Yes, it is; but not at the expense of a family and of children’s best interest. Shame should be on the courts—if that were possible—for compromising on the best, long-term interest of the children and expediently granting divorce to an unhappy or malcontent spouse. If the spouse was at risk of losing her children, would she do such a thing? I don’t think she would as often.
- 3. Marriage and parenthood are strongly interlinked. Men need cultural pressure...and the pressure has long been marriage.** Why is marriage on the decline and the family in dire straits? Do the courts recognize the social statistics that bear-out the link between fathers and marriage; or are the courts bent on the profitable industry of divorce amid the destructive outcome to our society?

**4. The most important and enduring dimension of fathering has to do with a child’s feelings. Children need to feel recognized and accepted by the fathers; they need to feel that they are special.**

Once again, the social benefits and virtues of the father-child relationship are made clear; the trouble is that precedence has been given—not to the children or the innocent—but often to the offending parent or spouse of the marriage and family. When do so-called individual rights go too far; or when does the want of the one supercede the needs of the many?

**5. Biological fathers are more likely to be committed to the upbringing of their children than are non-biological fathers...Engaged biological fathers care profoundly and selflessly about their own children, and such fatherly love is not something that can be transferred easily or learned from a script.** I cannot answer for other biological fathers, but for this one, David is right-on! Biological or natural father pose the safest circumstances for their young. Other adults in the household—who have no natural relations—are at higher risk or abuse or neglect in any or all forms.

In my comments and criticisms toward the government, I am not suggesting that such an institution can fix this social crisis. Personally, I don’t have any confidence in the government, the courts and cadre of divorce attorneys responsible in part for the crisis. As with any institution, blame or discredit cannot be levied on a personal level—but must be addressed at the institution, the motive and purpose behind such laws and court conduct.

“Castle Keeping” has all the imaginary of something tangible and secure, with the added connotation of service and vigilance. “Castle Keeping” is not about the structure or property, but more about society and culture as it views or defines the family and fatherhood. In the service and

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vigilance is the gatekeeper or watchtower to warn of potential or real threats, and to stand ready to defend and sacrifice as necessary; not a sacrifice (or sacrifices) that fleece the family or devalue the dad, but the sacrifice under girded with compassion and care. Now, the once-member of this imaginary castle stands outside the gate—rather than at the watchtower—and waits for his children to ask, “Friend of Foe?”

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