

After a divorce, children still need both parents

No one questions the value of two parents to a child's life until a marriage dissolves, and their parents find the courts still operating in the retro world of Ozzie and Harriet.

WENDY DENNIS
Toronto

Hedy Fry, Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and the Status of Women, appeared before the special joint Commons-Senate Committee on Custody and Access recently to argue against blanket rulings such as "forced joint custody and mandatory mediation." A child is not a piece of property, she told the committee and repeated in a piece on this page yesterday. The issue is about children's rights, not parents'.

I couldn't agree more. I, too, testified before the committee, though not as a representative of any advocacy group. I appeared as a divorced parent with joint custody (despite a highly litigious divorce), as a second spouse who has personally witnessed the tragic damage to children's lives by our current divorce practices — which treat children as the sole property of their mothers — and as a journalist who was so disturbed by what I witnessed that I felt I had a duty to write about it.

I said that while certain government-funded advocacy groups profess to speak for women, they did not speak for me; nor did they, I believe, speak for the majority of women in this country who, whether married or divorced, whether in acrimonious relationships with ex-spouses or not, recognized in their hearts how important it was for their children to maintain relationships with their fathers.

Ms. Fry and her *consoeurs* would have us believe that what's best for children is to maintain the status quo: that mothers should have the final say in all custodial matters, that children are entitled to the

financial support of both parents whether allowed to maintain contact with both or not, and that there can't be a presumption of joint custody in our divorce laws because of widespread domestic violence.

In effect, feminists are merely advocating more of the scandalous reality that exists today: a deeply biased system where, in spite of 30 years of feminism, it's still considered a social embarrassment for a

**Mothers and fathers
give their children
different gifts, but
each gives something
necessary and valuable.**

mother to lose custody of a child; where mothers have a vested interest in making false allegations and sabotaging joint custody to win dictatorial powers regarding the children and get off scot-free for violating court orders or denying their children contact with their fathers; where fathers see their children at their ex-wives' discretion while providing them with child support on pain of having their

wages garnisheed or their drivers' licences and passports revoked should they fail to make their payments. A system where the children whose rights Ms. Fry claims she wishes to protect are growing up robbed of the love and support, in the fullest sense of that word, of both parents.

I testified that in *The Divorce From Hell* (the magazine article that preceded my book) I wrote about a man who was the committed, car-pooling New Man feminists pulled down the walls of the patriarchy to help create. That man — whom feminists would have celebrated as an equally involved father to his children in marriage — was the same man feminists attacked for *not* walking away from his children (except in a bill-paying sense) in divorce. For me, that's the essential bankruptcy of the feminist establishment's position on divorce issues.

♦ ♦ ♦

In our communities the standard is that both parents raise their kids. Some parents are splitting the load more equally than others. But no one questions the value of two parents to a child's life until a marriage dissolves, and their parents wind up in divorce court and find the courts still operating in the retro world of

Ozzie and Harriet.

We know there is absolutely no reason to value the contribution of one parent over the other. Mothers and fathers give their children different gifts, but each gives something necessary and valuable. Feminists, however, cash in on the perceived moral superiority of women (especially mothers), then leap to the moral high ground and appropriate the language of children's best interests to advance their own.

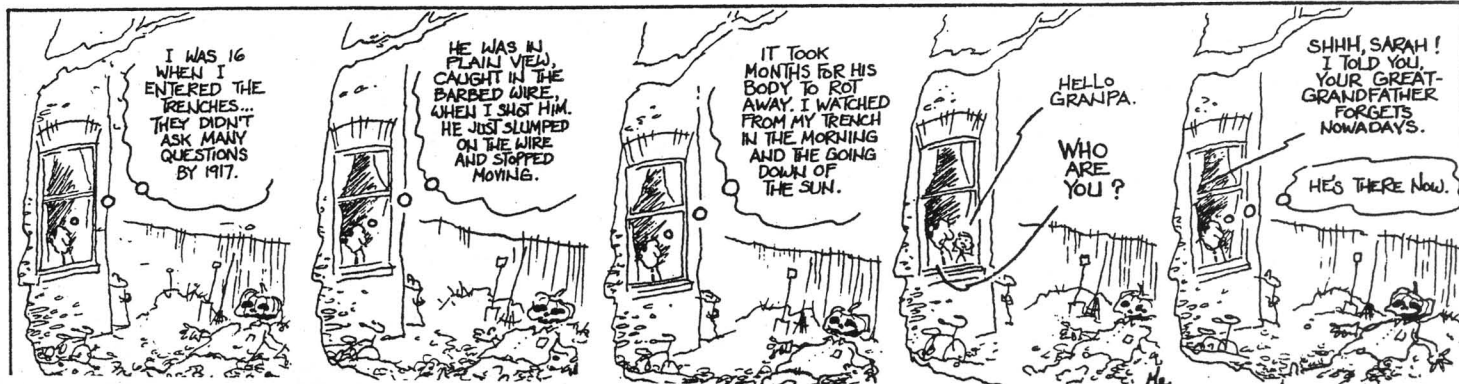
If we truly wish to protect children's interests we must remember that gender politics and a certain brand of feminist rhetoric have blinded us to the fact that what makes a good parent is character, not gender; that the vast majority of divorced parents in our communities are decent citizens who don't shirk their obligations and just want to raise their kids to the best of their abilities; and that, after divorce, not only do children yearn to be parented by both parents, but they are entitled to be.

♦ ♦ ♦

Wendy Dennis is the author of the just-released book The Divorce From Hell: How the Justice System Failed A Family, published by Macfarlane Walter & Ross.

BETWEEN POLLS

By Michael Eddenden



Articles submitted for use on the Commentary page should be no more than 700 words long. Writers will be contacted within two weeks if their pieces are accepted for publication. Writers who have not been contacted within that period, or within a shorter period they have stipulated at the