

Jessica Venable's baby

If Jessica Venable's baby can be stolen from her in the manner being proposed, is any child safe?

Let's say you're a 25 year-old woman who is studying for your Ph.D. in Ancient History and have an opportunity to continue your studies in Greece. But, you have a two year-old child. Your good fortune is that your parents agree to provide care and custody for the little one while you finish your studies and you all go to Court to arrange temporary guardianship. They might need legal standing for health issues, travel, etc., in your absence.

Then, after a few months, they realize that, at their ages, caring for a toddler is more than they bargained for, more demanding of their time and more restrictive on their leisure time, etc., and they decide to give your child, without your knowledge or permission, to younger friends of theirs. Just hand over your child to a couple who may have more immediate wealth than you do and can do more for and with your child than you can at the time.

Your studies are extended for six months and you want to remain in Greece where there actually *is* some ancient history instead of returning to Wyoming where there is none. Your parents agree, never telling you they didn't still have your daughter. The temporary guardianship was renewable annually but they had not taken the necessary steps with the Court to extend their guardianship. They probably thought that was unnecessary because they didn't even have your child anymore. They saw her once in awhile but the younger couple was contending with the demands of caring for a toddler.

The custodial couple, with no legal claim to your child, fall in love with the beautiful, intelligent little girl and want to adopt her. What do the guardians care? They see a local couple who took the little girl in while their own daughter, the mother of the little girl, cavorted in Greece, ostensibly to further her education but who knew the truth. She had been a wild teenager and she could be doing anything in Europe while they were stuck with her kid.

So, the "guardians" whose temporary guardianship had expired, filed a motion in the local court, having no legal claim on the child any longer and having given custody to friends, to terminate their daughter's parental rights so their friends could adopt the child - their granddaughter. It wasn't a matter of whether the mother of the child loved her and wanted her, the older generation *knew* what was best for everyone involved and thought the biological mother should not be consulted about their plans. It was unnecessary in their minds because she was absent.

Further, they knew that their daughter would need some time to become gainfully employed and earn anywhere near the money that their friends did. Their friends already owned their own house and their daughter would probably have to live with them - the parents - when she returned from Europe. Live with them with that demanding and precocious, albeit beautiful and lovable, little urchin.

To hell with that notion. They had given

over custody of their grandchild and now they wanted to give over legal possession - never sharing with their daughter their nefarious plans. Never considering what their daughter was trying to do with her life - that she was trying to do the best she could and make her parents proud of her accomplishments.

So, how would the Court decide?

Would a judge like Peter Arnold or Tom Campbell wrench the baby from the arms of her mother and hand her over to a couple who had no part in the creation of the child? Had no concern for the nights the mother cried herself to sleep in loneliness and despair because her actions had taken her from her baby? No, that was not important to those who had gained custody of a child not theirs because they had friends and they wanted to be rid of the demands of caring for the little one. Away from the care and custody they promised the baby's mother, their daughter, and the Court they would provide while the mother was away.

This narrative is shockingly similar to the real life experience Jessica Venable is now living. Her absence is not glamorous. She is at the Wyoming Women's Center in Lusk, not in Athens, Greece. She accepted bad advice and pled guilty to an act that did not constitute criminal behavior. She will not return to Cheyenne with a Ph.D. She may return with a bitterness created by being incarcerated under sometimes primitive conditions for 2 1/2 to 3 years of her - and her little girl and two older sons - lives.

There are attorneys who would represent those who have such a callous disregard for fairness, motherhood and the law. There really are. And we have them in Cheyenne. Steve Melchior is one.

In Jessica Venable's case, her "parents" in Cheyenne are not biological but she had always called them her parents to me. They had provided foster care for Jessica and a sister and Jessica wanted her three children to consider them grandparents. And they made promises to Jessica and the Court that they have now broken. Within months of Jessica being transferred from the jail here to Lusk, these "parents" were scheming to get rid of Jessica's kids. And they were probably confident, with an attorney who would take a despicable case like this, that they could do anything they wanted to a woman in prison.

Jessica was sentenced to 6-12 years for an incident that was not a crime. That public defender will also find a special place in hell when his time comes. Then, almost magically, Peter Arnold reduced that sentence by two years. Jessica first went into the Laramie County jail in June of 2008. She pled guilty to a crime. She was first charged with first degree murder and she was frightened that she could be executed for what was either an accident or an act of self-defense. When the charge was reduced to manslaughter and at the urging of an incompetent PD, she accepted a plea deal. She has told me

The Jessica Venable Compassion Fund

Previously, I invited readers of the Cheyenne Herald to make money donations to Jessica Venable during her incarceration at Lusk. She has been accepted at a halfway house in Gillette and it appeared she was on her way back to the freedom that should never have been stolen from her. That has been delayed a bit but it will still happen in the near future. In the meantime, and probably for the months Jessica spends at the halfway house, she can still use some financial help to purchase paper, envelopes, stamps, personal hygiene items, snacks, etc. So I am once again inviting readers to join my wife and me in providing some relief to this gal who is facing challenges on so many fronts. I am on her approved visitor list at Lusk and can send her money. If you would like to join us, please send your donation to me (checks payable to me or the Cheyenne Herald). I buy money orders to forward on to Jessica. You can also send her a card or note. Contact me for her mailing address. And, on behalf of Jessica, I, Dave Featherly, thank you.

she wanted to go to trial but the lousy PD only painted the worst picture - if the DA didn't reduce the charge and she was convicted, she could spend the rest of her life in prison. Bulls---. Not even Laramie County, Wyoming would convict a woman of first degree murder under the circumstances and history of this case. But, the public defender wanted to move on. He wanted to plead other innocents guilty and have them sent to prison because he feared trials. He would have had to prepare for a trial - that would have taken time. Witnesses in the neighborhood were never interviewed. That would have taken too much time and would have conflicted with his objective of getting Jessica to plead guilty so he could submit a billing to the State for several thousand dollars for his nonexistent defense.

Recently, Jessica's sentence was reduced and she should be home in the near future. Not tomorrow or the next day but not 6-12 years of incarceration either.

The "parents" must have panicked. That was not in the plan. They had to move faster to take her baby girl from her. After all, they had promised their friends that they could have the little girl. And not just to baby-sit - to have her forever and completely, with no interference or rights to the biological mother. They did not expect Jessica could make the argument that she'd be home to reclaim her children in the near future. Pleadings by her "parents" bottom-feeding attorney continue to misrepresent when Jessica is likely to be home. That misrepresentation was made to the judge who is very familiar with Jessica's case, the judge who both sentenced Jessica Venable and recently reduced that sentence.

I have written here several times that I believe attorneys should be placed under oath in the courtroom and all legal pleadings should be made under penalty of perjury. I once read a brief of an attorney who deliberately lied to the Court in order to get an axle swinging killer a probation-only sentence.

I first met Jessica Venable in October of 2009. She had been in Lusk about four months and it took some time to make arrangements with the warden to interview her for a story. From that point on, we have corresponded regularly and she has called me a few times. I cannot call her. From the time I met here until a letter from her yesterday, she has always spoken of her children with love and longing.

She has never forgotten them. She has never abandoned them. She has pleaded with her "parents" to bring the children to visit her or send photos (they won't) but that ended when they decided to end their guardianship of the youngest and oldest and hand them over to others. Jessica is proud of each of her children. Very proud.

In the brief filed by the parents to terminate Jessica's parental rights, the bottom-feeding attorney for the pair Jessica trusted with her children made statements I believe are false. He wrote as though the foster parents did not know of the circumstances Jessica faced when they agreed to accept temporary guardianship of her three children. They knew.

But, the parties who brought an action to terminate Jessica's parental rights of her little girl do not want to assume those rights for themselves but for friends. Melchior wrote: "Petitioners determined that the least restrictive and most appropriate and available residence for (VTV-the baby) under the circumstances was with "x" and "y," husband and wife, who are both adult persons who are residents of Laramie County ..." They are neither fit nor qualified to make that assessment.

In an effort to poison the court against Jessica, the lowlife attorney wrote about the case that took Jessica to Lusk. Worst of all his allegations is, "Jessie O. Venable has left her daughter in the care of another person without provision for the child's support and without any meaningful communication with the child for a period of over one (1) year."

That is an absolute fabrication, far from the truth. Gifts Jessica has sent to the little girl have been returned to her in Lusk. She writes letters for the middle son to read to VTV. Jessica is imprisoned, for God's sake. Something that may have been avoidable if her "parents" had done any kind of protective job for Jessica and the children when she was being repeatedly beaten and abused by the man who is the little girl's biological father. Those foster parents who loaned VTV to friends like a lawnmower should now have no say.

DFS is paying the medical costs and for care of the little one. Neither the "parents" nor their custodial friends are. In DFS's brief: "DFS has also provided \$6,374.80 child care payments for (VTV) from August 2008 through March 2010, with current authorizations through June 2010." That is in addition to \$15,771.01 Medicaid for the tyke.