**The Trial’s the Thing, Which will Reveal the Conscience of the Alienator**

*or*

*Here Comes the Targeted/Alienated Parent’s Expert Witness*

The Players, in order of appearance:

Lawyer for the alienated parent: Mr. I refuse to permit any more steamrolling by the professionals who intervene in child custody (Mr. No More Steamrolling, for short).

Expert witness for the alienated parent: Ms. Shared Parenting is Best for Kids (Ms. Shared Parenting, for short).

Judge: your Honor.

Lawyer for the Alienating Parent: Mr. One Sided.

Alienated Parent: Ms./Mr. Equal Rights to Children. (Ms./Mr. Equal Rights, for short).

Alienating Parent: Ms./Mr. I Want the Kids for Myself

Let the Trial Commence:

ACT 1: THE DIRECT:

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Ms. Shared Parenting, can you state your name and

 business location.

Ms. Shared Parenting: My name is Ms. Shared Parenting is Best for Kids, and my

 business address is 1 The System Must be Changed,

 Everywhere, USA.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Please state your licensing titles and what they mean.

Ms. Share Parenting: I am a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (“LMFT”)

 and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with R privileges (LCSW-r). My LCSW with the R privileges authorizes me to diagnose from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (“DSM”), as do psychiatrists.

As an LCSW-r, my scope of practice includes, but is not limited to, the diagnosis of mental, emotional, behavioral, addictive and developmental disorders and disabilities and of the psychosocial aspects of illness, injury, disability and impairment undertaken within a psychosocial framework; administration and interpretation of tests and measures of psychosocial functioning; development and implementation of appropriate assessment-based treatment plans; and the provision of crisis oriented psychotherapy and brief, short-term and long-term psychotherapy and psychotherapeutic treatment to individuals, couples, families and groups, habilitation, psychoanalysis and behavior therapy; all undertaken for the purpose of preventing, assessing, treating, ameliorating and resolving psychosocial dysfunction with the goal of maintaining and enhancing the mental, emotional, behavioral and social functioning and well-being of individuals, couples, families, small groups, organizations, communities and society.

As a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, my scope of practice includes but is not limited to the diagnosis of dysfunctional family interactional patterns that negatively impact the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral functioning of one or more of the family members. It particularly emphasizes the immense and unrivaled influence of parents on the emotional and behavioral well-being of the child, either negatively or positively. It emphasizes that a dysfunctional parental subsystem is generally the sole cause of symptomatic behaviors in the child. As, for example, when one parent co-opts the child in a coalition to minimize, deprecate, and/or reject the other parent. Indeed, I assert that this interactional pattern is the root of virtually all symptoms in the child.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Ms. Shared Parenting, please summarize your

 professional education.

Ms. Shared Parenting: I received my bachelors degree from X University in \_\_\_\_\_;

I received my LMFT degree from X University in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; I completed X PhD credits in family therapy from X

University in\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; I trained in family therapy at the Minuchin Center for the Family, where I studied for 90 hours each year for 9 years. I was personally trained by Salvador Minuchin, MD, the world-renowned, highly respected child psychiatrist, who was voted in 2007 in a research study of mental health therapists to be one of 10 of the most influential therapists the entire history of mental health.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Ms. Shared Parenting: Could you please state whether

 you have been qualified as an expert witness in family dynamics and where that was.

Ms. Shared Parenting: I have been qualified as an expert witness in the

 diagnosis and treatment of family functioning in Monroe County, Pennsylvania; Suffolk County, New York; and Nassau County, New York, and in the state of Michigan.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: You have emphasized your training in family therapy.

 Why is that so important?

Ms. Shared Parenting: Well, children in this country are reared in the family, and

 parents have the greatest influence over them. So you can’t possibly assess children properly if you do not have a grounding in family dynamics. Only the LMFT degree provides this grounding.

Mr. More Steamrolling: are you saying that psychiatrists, even child psychiatrists, do not have a grounding in family dynamics?

Ms. Shared Parenting: especially child psychiatrists, who specialize in bio-chemical

 disorders. No other mental health profession has more than the basic, family dynamics 101 class in their curriculum, if they even have that. I read the licensing criteria in New York State for the title of psychologist and psychiatrist, and the word “family” is not mentioned even one time. And I checked with the licensing requirements for this state, and I discovered the same surprising result. I would venture to say that all 50 states make no reference to the word “family” in the licensing requirements and scope of practice for any mental health discipline outside of the LMFT title, with the possible exception of clinical social work. But, even in Clinical Social Work, family dynamics may or may not be the focus of the licensee’s education. Indeed, when I was on the faculty of the Minuchin Center, I actually trained child psychiatrists who had applied to the program. Unless the adult professional undertook additional training beyond the PhD or M.D. degree, they do not have a grounding in family dynamics. And I might add, to obtain the LMFT degree, the candidate must have 60 hours in family therapy, including 2 internships providing family therapy services.

Mr. More Steamrolling: You new mean to say, Ms. Shared Parenting, that only an expert with the title of LMFT is qualified to comment on family dynamics?

Mr. One Sided: Objection, Your Honor. The witness has already answered this question in extensive detail. Mr. No More Steamrolling is merely trying to prejudice the court against my expert witness.

Judge: Objection sustained. Your point, Mr. one-sided, is well-taken. However, so are the points made by Ms. Shared parenting. You may proceed, Mr. No More Steamrolling, with your questions regarding the next point you wish to make.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Please summarize your work experience in family

 treatment beginning with the latest 1st:

Ms. Shared Parenting: I am currently in private practice as a Marriage and

 Family Therapist since 1995. I served on his faculty of the Minuchin Center for the Family from 2003-2007. I worked as a caseworker in foster care beginning in 1970, and I ended my career in foster care in 1994 as the Assistant Director of Foster and Adoption for Nassau County, New York.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: How many families and children have you worked with

 since being in private practice?

Ms. Shared Parenting: I would say approximately 2 to 3000 children and

 approximately 1500 families during the past 17 years.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Could you, Ms. Shared Parenting, briefly summarize your

 responsibilities as the Assistant Director of Foster Care and Adoption?

Ms. Share Parenting: As the Assistant Director, I was responsible for making

 Discharge and custody decisions about when the parent was rehabilitated so that the child could be discharged to them. I was responsible to ensure that the social work staff did everything possible to collaborate with the parents to accept the necessary rehabilitative services to overcome the barriers to discharge. I was responsible to assure that social work staff guaranteed to the parent and child a regular and meaningful schedule for parenting time/visits between the parent and the child. I was responsible to make sure that staff kept the biological parent updated on all their child’s developments and issues. I was responsible for making the decision as to whether or not to terminate parental rights and free the child for adoption because the parent was not capable or was refusing to be rehabilitated. I was responsible to ensure that my staff connected the child to all necessary services to facilitate good adjustment to foster to care.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: It appears, Ms. Shared Parenting, that you took your

responsibility of family reunification very seriously.

 What was the rationale for that?

Ms. Shared Parenting: Family therapists recognize that, no matter what the parent

 had done to necessitate the removal, children crave and need a meaningful relationship with their parents. We also recognize that all the research on child welfare and development supports that the child's optimal emotional, cognitive, physical, and behavioral development occurs when both biological parents are meaningfully involved in her/his life.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Ms. Shared Parenting, you stated both parents. What

 happens if the parent is absent due to death?

Ms. Shared Parenting: Loss due to death is completely different than

 deliberate eradication of a parent from a child's life, either self-imposed eradication or eradication by the other parent. Children understand that loss due to death was not a voluntary choice.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: You mentioned children who had been subjected to

 abuse/and or neglect by their parents and they still craved a relationship with their parents. So how would you explain the expressed hatred of a parent who is loving and nurturing?

Ms. Shared Parenting: The only explanation would be a brainwashing by the

other parent.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: So you would agree with Christopher Barden, PhD., JD., who has received 2 national research awards in psychology and a law degree with honors from Harvard Law school, when he stated, “There can be no credible controversy about the power of parents to influence children.” (*The International Handbook of Parental Alienation Syndrome*, p. 420*)*?

Ms. Shared Parenting: absolutely, 100%.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: And would you also agree with the following

 comment by Barden when he stated that custody cases require “the critical obligation to carefully review the influence of parents, therapists or other adults on the attitudes, beliefs and memories of children.” (pp. 419-432)?

Ms. Shared Parenting: Such influence cannot be disputed. And in particular, in cases of alienation or triangulation, whatever name you choose to call it, one must assume that the child’s expressions reflects the views, attitudes, and feelings of the alienating parent. Professionals frequently become co-opted by the alienating parent because their words are mimicked by their puppet child. It is generally only the family therapist who recognizes the necessity to contact the other parent to hear the other side of the story.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Can you give some examples as to how children get caught up in their parents’conflicts.

Ms. Shared Parenting: It is not that difficult to observe this. Without realizing it,

 parents all the time ask the child's allegiance in a dispute with the other parent, generally quite innocently when the parents are together. The parent will say something like “oh Johnny, didn't you hear me tell your father this before?” But in divorce cases, it is usually not so innocent and not so minor. There is a deliberate campaign by the alienating parent to poison the child against the other parent. In severe cases the alienating parent’s goal is to sever the relationship with the other parent.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Do family therapists have a word to describe this family

 interactional pattern?

Ms. Shared Parenting: Yes, they certainly do. It is called “triangulation.” Child psychiatrist, Murray Bowen, labeled it the “pathological triangle. ” Indeed, Bowen and was so convinced about the family’s role in creating and maintaining the child's symptoms, that when he hospitalized the child, he also hospitalized the entire nuclear family. This interactional pattern was observed and extensively documented as early as the 1950s by the child psychiatrists who later founded the family therapy movement. Indeed mentor, Salvador Minuchin, asserted that it is the basis of virtually all dysfunctional family relationships adversely affecting children, and the concept of triangulation can be readily found in his book entitled, *Family Therapy Techniques*, 1981. Dr. M actually labeled this triangulation as a cross-generational alliance between the child and a parent who is in conflict with the other parent. This is the key interactional pattern that occurs in high conflict divorce cases such as this one.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Ms. Shared Parenting, could you kindly tell the court

 how you made your assessments regarding what is happening to the X family, which we are discussing today.

Ms. Shared Parenting: I made my assessment upon having reviewed and/or

 observed numerous Skype sessions between alienated parent and children, documents submitted by Mr. X and Mrs. X to the court, various forms of communication between Mr. and Ms. X; supervised visit reports; deposition testimony by, M.D.; and by, PhD and by Mr. and Mrs. X. Finally and most significantly, I make my assessment based upon my expertise in normal and abnormal child development, upon my expertise in healthy and unhealthy family functioning, upon my knowledge and experience regarding how parents influence and affect children, and upon my training, experience with, and knowledge about, parental alienation.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Ms. Shared Parenting, are the X children being reared

 in a family?

Ms. Shared Parenting: Indeed, they are.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Would it be your contention then that the

 dysfunctional parental relationship in this family are

adversely affecting the children?

Mr. One Sided: Objection, your honor. Mr. No More Steamrolling is

 leading the witness.

Judge: Sustained. Mr. more Steamrolling, please rephrase the

 question.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Ms. Shared Parenting, in your professional opinion

 are the X children exhibiting symptoms and how do you account for that?

Ms. Shared Parenting: The X children are expressing an anti-instinctual hatred

 and fear of their targeted parent. Upon questioning, they provided only for frivolous rationalizations that are completely out of proportion to the relationship they had with that parent. For example, the 16-year-old expressed that she hated her father because of a disappointing trip to Hawaii 5 years ago. And her 14-year-old sister expressed that she can remember only one positive experience with her father, and that was going on a bike ride when she was 6 years old. This was all stated very serioulsy despite having taken with their father teen cruises, Broadway shows, camping trips, ski trips, and other activities which the girls had requested.

(Ms. Shared Parenting supplies many more examples of how the children are indicative of being alienated from their targeted parent)

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Ms. Shared Parenting, can you provide examples

 about how Mr. or Ms. I Want the Children for Myself, has engaged in behaviors designed to alienate the children from their other parent.

Ms. Shared Parenting: The examples are numerous and include but are

 not limited to the sabotage of visits: denial of information regarding the children's educational, medical, and social activities; sharing with the children information about the legal proceedings; deprecating the other parent by calling her/him irresponsible, child abuser, and an abandoner her of the children; filing false child abuse and domestic violence charges. (Case specifics must be provided here).

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Do you believe that children should have the

 responsibility of making the decision whether or not to visit with have a relationship with their targeted parent?

Ms. Shared Parenting: Absolutely not! Children do not have the emotional and

 cognitive development and abilities to determine what is in their best interests. A rational person would no more allow a to decide about this then would a child be allowed to decide whether to attend school or medical appointments.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Ms. Shared Parenting: What happens to children

 when a parent is eradicated from that child's life?

Ms. Shared Parenting: When a parent is eradicated from a child's life,

 they are left with an emotional hole, and that hole is not filled with good things. Virtually every child I worked with----and there must be several hundred if not more----who was alienated from a parent, had a highly negative outcome. The child became involved with drugs and alcohol, eating disorders, educational issues, psychiatric problems, antisocial behaviors, criminal activities and/or poor peer relationships.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: These seem like very serious concerns. And it

 would appear that they are definitely avoidable if the children were not subject to a brainwashing by one parent. Would that be your professional opinion?

Ms. shared, parenting: There is no question that this is avoidable, and because it is actively and deliberately done, I consider it to be a form of emotional child abuse.

Mr. No More Steamrolling: Child abuse? So what should be your remedy to

 these situations?

Ms. Shared Parenting: Alienating a child by one parent from another parent so

 inimical to a child's best interests that it must be treated like any other form of child abuse. If it does not stop immediately, the result must be transfer of custody to the alienated parent just as CPS does a removal when the abuse does not cease.

Mr. more Steamrolling: I have no more questions of this witness.

Judge: The court will take a break will return after lunch PART II: THE CROSS.