

"I am your Child."

I am a child of divorce.

My name is Justicinette. ("Little Justice" - actually, that's not my real name.)
I have two sisters. They too, are children of divorce.

I live in the country of France with my mother - she's French. I love my Daddy, (in French, "mon Papa") and I always will. Papa is from America.

Papa loves me very much. Dad loved my Mom (in French, "Maman"). Papa and Maman were together for more than 25 years. One day, she wanted him to go away, "...back to America", she said. He doesn't know why. I don't know why. I am his child too.

If you are a parent, it may be, that I am your child.

My parent's divorce became finalized in January of 1997 when I was thirteen (and when my sisters were fifteen and eighteen) years old. This took place after nearly five years of chaos - a hell for our Dad and much unhappiness for me. My mother was granted sole custody, and although my father fought it with everything he had, he lost literally everything he had. He tried to save our family. I realize now that Papa was very courageous. I know he loves me (and my two sisters) more than anyone else in his life.

Papa was forced to return to live in Wisconsin with Grandma Lou - she's 87 - it must be hard for her. Dad's life collapsed, so the court ordered him to pay money to my Mom every month. I don't understand. Was that intended to help him recover from losing me or to help him in some other way? I know justice in France to be a farce.

The French courts did NOT take the facts into account. For example, I now know about Mom's mental illness, like when she attempted suicide. Papa saved her life that day, then stood by and gave her support.

Mom had been leading the life of an adulteress, seduced by her university advisor - a mathematician known mostly for his prowess in algebraic number theory. You know, one of those theoretical "geeks" who "accomplish a lot of nothing very useful".

That man is the head of the mathematics department at "Trinity College" in Cambridge, England - he's sometimes been seen on British TV "stealing the thunder" of Mom's former "Stanford" office-mate, Mr. A.W. who has become a famous fellow in his own right.

A.W. performed some impressive intellectual gymnastics and managed to prove "Fermat's Last Theorem". My Papa forgave that math-man, and my Mom, and stayed with her. Funny, Mom always said that my Dad was the most intelligent man she'd ever met. I don't know much more about that math-man, just that he was preparing to leave HIS children. In the end, he is also responsible for OUR unhappiness. My Papa suffered greatly because of him.

After Mom initiated her divorce plans, the French family sided with her like a Scottish Clan. They don't speak to my Papa anymore. They used to call him "son" and "brother". Meanwhile, Dad's family has broken no ties and told no lies.

Papa has been accused of all sorts of crazy things that aren't true. Mom found people who were willing to lie about them in writing: mostly her family, her friends. Who else would? I know the truth.

Mom works for a French computer software company, called Matra Datavision. She travels all over the world. She was gone a lot before and during the divorce. She doesn't travel so much any more - I guess because Papa is no longer around to help her the way he always did. Papa loved her very much.

We still live in the modern, five-bedroom house that Dad kept in perfect order (but that isn't anymore). Maman now has three cars to choose from (Dad's car included). There is a 5-acre yard (two hectares) filled with nearly 100 species of trees and shrubs that Dad planted with my late French grandfather.

Maman earns a salary that is 5 times the average French household wage, and yet she kept all of the money she and Dad had accumulated together. Mom also keeps all of the rental income from an apartment in Marseilles (purchased with him many years ago). She receives money from the French government (in France, people who have "large" families, are entitled to public financial aide (whether they need it or not), but only the parent who has child-custody gets any.

Dad always saw to it that he and Mom had no indebtedness as a couple.

When it came to the actual litigation, Dad was never allowed to speak during the process. His 250 letters and affidavits (which proved his status as a sober, non-violent, hard-working, wise, good and adoring father were never read) - two judges explained, they "...have no time for that." One judge literally told him to "shut up" as Dad entered a hearing room (he'd not uttered a sound) and was not allowed to comment after Mom stoically asked to have him put out of my life.

One "lawyer" was so dishonest, that Dad had to sue him for "legal malpractice" and for over-billing. Dad won that case. His next two lawyers "practiced" essentially the same "mafia-like" methods. One of the judges even asked to be paid in order to obtain a favorable decision.

"Bien", you are a rich American? You know what you must do to have custody of your children, "n'est-ce pas"? Pretty scandalous, but maybe you know how things are in France? I know the truth, because I am growing up here. Everybody knows...

Dad was ordered out of our house and told to leave me. Dad got nothing.

Under French law, all financial settlements are processed as a lawsuit that is separate from the actual divorce proceedings. Dad has a very hard life now. He'll have to sue my Mom (person he loved and mother of we, his children) if he wants any of the things and money she has kept.

Papa told me that he doesn't want money or things. He wants me and to love me. Papa is very alone and very, very sad. I am sad too. I know why.

I am writing this because I wish to see change. Change must occur to undo this insane, corrupt, even non-functional justice system that has permanently altered my relationship with my father. Their "flip of the coin" humanity has altered everything for the duration of our lives, and life is all too short. He's now 45 years old, and is 8000 miles and seven time zones away from me.

That corrupt system told him that he was at fault, to "get a life" (to start life over again) without me. Dad is very angry (Dare I say, "pissed?"). They sent him the bill for the court costs. I know why.

Our family started out in a fairly normal way. I remember watching children's programs on TV with Papa (while smelling one of my Mom's half-burned pot-roasts in the air). I remember being carried around on Papa's shoulders and playing with him in my child-sized playhouse (he had designed it with working shutters and a miniature "Dutch-door"). I also remember riding on "Prince-Noir" (Black Prince) the wooden horse-swing he also built for me (which looked just like the one he loved as a boy).

I do remember waiting for Mom to come to play with me sometimes, but she had her work on her mathematics for her computer programs. She often stayed late at her job or was gone on her extended trips overseas. I do not know why.

Papa was always there to take care of me (and everything else). Mom was very absent. Her employer lied about all of that of course (because she was helping them to make money-millions). We had a father-daughter relationship - firmly rooted for growth.

A mother-daughter relationship was sometimes possible.

As time went by, the climate in our house became tense. I felt impending gloom and doom. It erupted after a month-long family vacation to America. Mom got

worse and then a sinister lull settled in.

Seven months later (when I was an 8½-year-old), I followed my father around our house while he packed his suitcase, taking only the personal belongings my mother would let him have - which did not include me.

Papa had orders to leave and was "given" two hours to arrive home from the Avignon courthouse to do so. I begged him to stay. He held me for a long time. Finally he pulled me away as he left our house shaking in tears. My sisters and I called out to him. We screamed, "Papa! Papa!" I cried and cried with my two sisters (who were only 10 and 12½ years old). He came back and again hugged all three of us, as one (something he called our "hug-huddles"). We continued our crying as Mom silently disappeared upstairs - to study her copy of Marcel Proust's, "L'enfant? Perdu" (or some title like that) - while I cried some more - a lot more. Maybe Mom was anxious to finish an Agatha Christie mystery?

Thus began my Papa's weekend visits. In his absence, he became a stranger to me, a curiosity. There were no more leisurely afternoons playing with my dogs in the yard where he loved to garden.

We now embarked on the most exciting weekend trips appropriate for our ages: toy-stores, movies, and malls. We sometimes came home empty-handed. I didn't care, because I just wanted to be with my Papa. Then we went back to his small house (his modest, rented living quarters, situated as near to us as was possible). I spent time with him there until he dropped us off at home - never sure I would see him until the next weekend arrived. The neighbors figured that he moved-in nearby to "harass" my Mom. I know that he was there for, me.

A new set of rules was imposed on our house. My mother accepted a "promotion" and was gone even more frequently. Her maids and my sisters became my Mother; cooking, cleaning, and disciplining me.

My Dad was once the man of the house, but he also did most of the cooking, cleaning and shopping - because Mom was gone so much. He also disciplined me but offered me affection. He wanted Mama to spend more time with us. Since then, my father is spoken of very little; I only heard his name as he is being chastised or blamed for something or other, that never happened, or that he didn't say.

Several times I've burst into tears, overwhelmed by his absence and feeling a great sense of loss. Each time, I was told to be strong, to be wise and quit feeling sorry for myself. I was certainly not to shed tears in front of my French Grandmother (who hated him, it seemed). I do not know why.

How ironic, I was told not to display grief while I was told by my mother what a lousy father I had. At this point our relationship had changed considerably. The

man who came to pick me up on weekends was no longer the strong, stable father I had known. I sensed panic, helplessness and guilt coming from my Dad.

I pitied him for his guilt and helplessness, while loving and idolizing him intensely. I hoped that my Daddy would come home soon to defend my mother and siblings and would be strong again.

All perceptions from an 8½-year-old (...a 10 year old, ...a 12½ year old).

My father and I lost so much time. There were ordinary, routine moments that will never come again. Moments a father and a child both have a right to - things a father should be able to see and share with his children - and they with him.

I am a grieving child who aches for her father.

I'll soon be an adult who bears the scars and the open wounds of separation and divorce. I do not offer specific solutions for this problem; I am only articulating what I as a child and what all children caught in the divorce process are experiencing and cannot voice themselves.

Is this the outcome that Mother really wanted for herself, for him, and for me?

To the fathers who read this:

I AM YOUR CHILD. I LOVE YOU. I NEED YOU! FIGHT FOR ME! NEVER GIVE UP! NEVER...