

MICHAEL JUSTICE

Judges rip child from parents



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Every now and then we get lost during the course of our lives. We confuse what is important with what we think is important.

Sports, going out on Saturday nights, the clothes we wear, the grades we get, money — these are things we think are important. Family, relationships, honesty, friendship, integrity, happiness — these are things that are important.

This past July, all the things that were important were taken away from a little boy — not by a criminal, but by the highest form of justice in the state: a judge.

Actually, seven Illinois Supreme Court justices failed 3-year-old Richard. Miserably.

After spending his entire life with his adoptive parents, the Illinois Supreme Court overturned an Illinois appellate court decision and ordered Richard to be awarded to his birth parents. This is the same birth mother who had declared him dead and the same birth father who, until recently, wasn't even aware of Richard's existence.

Richard's adoption had been legalized; yet, according to the court, the adoption didn't mean a thing. The biological father, who married the mother after Richard's birth, decided to pursue his legal rights to the child. He won.

Now Richard has to be literally ripped away from the only home he has ever known. It is as if he were a lost pet. "Thanks for watching our dog for three years. We'll be by to pick him up soon."

But he is not a pet or mantelpiece or misplaced item. He is a child — a child whose world revolves around his parents. His real mother and father. The two people who have fed him, bathed him, nurtured him, protected him and, most importantly, loved him.

They did not declare him dead, as the biological mother had done

(which makes one wonder about the mental condition of this woman). They rejoiced in having him as their child, the greatest gift of all. Now all they can do is watch as their son is taken away.

I can't decide which party is the bigger monster here, the Illinois Supreme Court or the biological parents. It is the court's responsibility to protect the innocent, but its stupidity and lack of sensitivity and compassion has impeded its duty.

And the parents' selfishness and blatant lack of concern for the true well-being of Richard makes me wonder just how bleak of a future he must endure with these cretins. How can anyone consciously steal a child from his home? I hope I never encounter a person so cruel.

Before Richard's case made it to the Supreme Court, he was protected in a lower court. There, Judge Dom J. Rizzi wrote the following on Richard's behalf:

"Richard is not a piece of property ... (he) 'belongs' to no one but himself ... (and) it is his best interests that come before anything else, including the interests and rights of biological and adoptive parents ...

"Courts are here to protect children — not to victimize them."

Another aspect of this ruling is the effect it may have on other similar cases. Will all adoptive parents be forced to go through the same hell as Richard's?

It appears that even if they go through all the proper, state-issued requirements, adoptive parents still aren't guaranteed any rights as parents. Even after three years. If I were an adoptive parent in Illinois, I would fear the worst.

Illinois Gov. Jim Edgar said: "The highest court in this state has committed a travesty ... I cannot imagine how the justices who prevailed in this case will be able to sleep at night."

The justice who wrote the Supreme Court opinion, James D. Heiple, had this to say: "Laws are designed to protect natural parents in their pre-emptive rights to their own children wholly apart from any consideration of the so-called best interests of the child."

How can anyone, especially a judge, be so ignorant.

Heiple has since turned down Richard's adoptive parents' plea to reconsider his ruling. Heiple has had two opportunities to protect Richard and has failed. Perhaps it comes down to Heiple not being man enough to admit he made a horrible, tragic mistake. Pride can do that.

Fortunately, Richard has one more chance: the U.S. Supreme Court, if it decides to take the case.

So before you worry about where to go tonight, say a prayer for Richard. This is important.

Justice is a junior news-editorial and broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

MICHELLE PAULMAN

Stop whining in Washington



Granted, our government today is bigger than Rush Limbaugh's head, slower than a residence hall elevator and more frustrating than trying to find a parking space at 10:30 a.m.

"Unh! ... I don't WANNA read this book ... I don't WANNA write a 10-page paper ... I don't LIKE stress ..."

When projects hit me like a ton of bricks, I turn into a whining 3-year-old who has just been told to pick up her toys. Unfortunately, a 3-year-old is probably better at organizing her tasks than I am.

I've tried keeping a daily organizer, making lists, even posting sticky notes around my room. Nothing works. I'm left with wall-to-wall sticky notes and a pile of things to do that includes getting all the sticky notes off my walls.

In the end, I have no one to whine to but myself. To paraphrase Harry Truman, the sticky note stops here.

With nowhere left to pass the buck, I put my nose to the grindstone and into my book, which talks in part about the ratification of our Constitution.

Shallow versions of history imply that everyone thought the new outline for our government was the greatest thing since pewter. In reality, each side hated parts that the other liked, and neither would approve it until each side gave something to the other.

This time-honored American tradition is known as whining, bickering, or in some circles, politics.

I envisioned the opposition putting bumper stickers on their horse-drawn carriages that said: "Don't blame ME. I voted AGAINST the Constitution."

I wish those same people could travel in time to 1994 and see that the same system they opposed still is working almost 203 years later with only 27 revisions.

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But that's how it's supposed to work. When everyone thinks they have the perfect cure for our ills, mixing a prescription that most people can swallow will take some time.

However, the minority insists on whining: "Don't blame me. I voted for Bush."

Blame you for what? Taxes? The crime bill? The whole democratic process? French fries being served at White House dinners? What?

Sure, the Republicans are entitled to a little whine every now and then, but enough is enough.

When the crime bill was considered during George Bush's administration, the Republicans loved it. Now that a Democrat is in office, they have forgotten they ever wanted it.

Playing world policeman — such as we did in Grenada, Panama and Kuwait — was fine and dandy as long as Republican presidents were wearing the badge. But talk about freeing Haiti from a cruel military regime, and Republicans suddenly worry about risking American lives.

Oddly enough, after the crisis in Haiti cooled, all the Democrats and 120 Republicans in the House of Representatives voted to bring our troops home.

All 45 votes to keep them there were cast by Republicans.

Those who need more examples of Republican antics can catch up with that federal-debt display that was here a couple of weeks ago.

Nothing happens in a vacuum. Many of the ills that plague our nation stem from the policies of Ronald Reagan and George Bush. But the Republicans have laid the blame not on themselves, but on a man who was governor of Arkansas when the sticky notes were flying in Congress.

The next time I see a "Don't blame me" sticker, I'm going to run up to the driver and scream: "Oh, YEAH? Well, I DO blame you! I blame you for the rich who got richer while the poor got poorer. I blame you for the fact that fewer people can afford health insurance. I blame you for the huge national debt on my shoulders, and I blame you for Richard Nixon! You, you ... elephant!"

Now that I'm done whining, I propose that the fools on Capitol Hill do the same and start working together to find remedies with which most of us can agree. The medicine might be nasty, but we need it desperately.

Then pick up your toys before you go to bed.

Paulman is a senior news-editorial and history major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



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