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PERSPECTIVES ON PARENTS WHO ABDUCT THEIR CHILDREN:  
WINDOWS ON A LIMITED SAMPLE

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Perspective on Parents Who Abduct Their Children:  
Windows on a Limited Sample

The problem of parental kidnapping is of national and international proportions. Predictions as to the incidence of family-related abductions vary widely with some self-reports running as high as 350,000 annually, most of these being of short duration (one week or less) (Finkelhor, Hotaling, & Sedlak, 1990; 1991). The toll that these abductions take on the children as well as on the parents left behind has only recently been documented (e.g. Greif & Hegar, 1992; 1993; Hatcher, Barton, & Brooks, 1992; Janvier, McCormick, & Donaldson, 1990; Sagatun & Barrett, 1990) in studies that surpass in scope earlier case reports (e.g. Schetky & Haller, 1983).

Family abduction has been defined as "the taking, retention, or concealment of a child or children by a parent, other family member, or their agent, in derogation of the custody rights, including visitation rights, of another parent or family member." (Girdner & Hoff, 1992: 1). Why do these abductions occur? Although researchers have asked the parent left behind the reasons they believe the abductor acted, much less is known about the reasons for the abduction from the perspective of the abductor, which leaves a significant gap in our understanding of this problem.

The purpose of this research was to learn from a limited sample of former abductors (i.e. parents who at some point in the past abducted one or more children and who no longer are in hiding or in violation of a custody order) what their reasons were for

their actions. In exploring this with them, we asked about their backgrounds, their marital histories, their relationships with their children before and during the abduction, why they abducted, how they were located while in hiding, and what the consequences have been since their location. During the course of explaining the purpose of our research to the abductors, the illegality of the act was rarely at issue, though many believed their actions were justified. It was within this context, and with the full knowledge that we were funded by the Department of Justice, that the interviews with abductors occurred.

#### Other Discussions of Abductors

The literature on abductors' motivations is based almost exclusively on accounts or reports from professionals and searching parents. The progression of knowledge has grown slowly from case reports of returned children seen in clinics to a gathering of information from multiple sources. In our own work (Greif & Hegar, 1993), we gathered information about abductors through two methods - descriptions given by 371 searching parents and personal and telephone interviews with a handful of abductors themselves. The searching parents had participated in a survey of 15 missing children's organizations throughout the United States and Canada. Parents who had contacted any of those organizations for assistance in locating a parentally abducted child were mailed a questionnaire and asked to return it in a stamped addressed envelope to the

researchers. A slight majority (55%) of the abductors were male, 84% were white, and 87% were U.S.- born. Half were described as having been raised in a home with a substance-abusing parent, one-third as having been physically abused, and one-fifth as having been sexually abused. One-third of the abductors were exposed to domestic violence while growing up, according to the parent left behind. At the time of the abduction, half of the abductors were said to have been unemployed, and only 40% had some education past high school. The marriages were often characterized by domestic violence, with almost half of the left behind parents saying they had been on the receiving end of abuse by the abductor.

When asked about the abductor's level of involvement with the children during the marriage, almost half were depicted as being "involved" or "very involved" with the children's physical care, with mothers having more involvement than fathers. An even higher percentage were described as being close emotionally with the children. Visitation between the abducted child and the abductor was fairly frequent, with two-thirds seeing the child at least once every other week just prior to the abduction.

The reasons the left behind parents gave for the abductions tended to focus on revenge motives - 77% believed the abduction occurred to hurt the searching parent. Less frequently given reasons included: "anger over the breakup (23%); a desire to be with the child (16%); pressure from others (13%); dissatisfaction with visitation (13%); and the new marriage or relationship of the parent left behind (9%)" (Greif & Hegar, 1993: p. 34).

Four case studies based on interviews with abductors (Greif & Hegar, 1993) show a different side to the issue. Two of the abductors, one with custody and one without it at the time of the abduction, were spurred on by the unresponsiveness of the court system and concerns about sexual abuse. Three of the four were concerned with how the children were being raised - in one case as social recluses, in another to hate their mother, and in a third to deal with life passively rather than actively. One mother acted because she feared her children were going to have the same experience of being raised without a mother as she had.

#### Typology of Abductions

As an aid to understanding the complexities of parental abduction, we (Greif & Hegar, 1993) classified the five most commonly seen patterns using two characteristics: whether there was violence in the relationship and custody status at the time of the abduction. These two characteristics in turn showed significant relationship with the gender of the abductor, reasons given for the breakup, reasons given for the abduction, and whether force was used in the abduction. The five patterns were called "violent visitor," "nonviolent visitor," "nonviolent shared custodian," "violent shared custodian," and "custodian." These patterns, based on data presented by the parent left behind, are also used in the current study to advance our understanding of the parental abductors interviewed (See Figure 1).

The most commonly seen pattern was that of the violent visitor

(28%). In this pattern, the noncustodial abductor with a reported history of family violence tended to be male, to have caused the marital breakup because of violence or substance abuse, to have abducted to hurt the other parent, and to have used force during the abduction.

The nonviolent visitor (18%) tended to be female and to have had a marriage that ended either because of incompatibility or the abductor's personal problems. The abduction was believed to have taken place because of the abductor's desire to be with the child and force was not used.

The third pattern, the nonviolent shared custodian (15%), also tended to have a female abductor. Here custody was shared at the time of the abduction in that it occurred either during a joint custody arrangement after divorce or while the parents were still together. The abductor in this nonviolent relationship was believed most often to have acted because she was unhappy with her visitation arrangement, or the abduction itself often caused the end of the marriage.

The violent shared custodian (11%) pattern was seen in situations where a male tended to take the child following a violent relationship where spouse abuse was the reason for the breakup. These abductors, also sharing custody, were believed to act out of a fear of a loss of control or of losing contact with the child if a custody decision was made. Force was used during some of the abductions.

Finally, the custodian abduction (12%) pattern occurs when the

custodial parent, often a female, leaves with a child. These abductors tend to not be described as violent, to have marriages that end because of incompatibility, and to abduct (without using force) because of pressure from others.

A few comments on these patterns are needed. First, although the nonviolent shared custodian is the third largest observed pattern, we discuss in our earlier work that this group is underreported. It is hypothesized that nonviolent shared custodians may be fleeing violent spouses and that the left behind parents who provided the information on which the typology is based underreported violence perpetrated by themselves. Second, custodian abductions may occur in some cases because the abductor fears the visiting parent is abusive. This circumstance is also not likely to be described by the left behind parent. Third, parents left behind who are suspicious of research or of contacting agencies for help with recovering their children may be underrepresented. These parents may include members of disenfranchised minorities or women or men who believe that missing children's organizations or other agencies are biased against them.

We will return later to a discussion of the typology and its application to the abductors' case studies.

#### Other Research

Others have also studied abductors. Sagatun and Barrett's (1990) description of 25 abducting mothers and 18 abducting fathers centers on interviews with counselors and analysis of court files

in one Los Angeles county. The situations ranged from parents with custody vanishing with their children to noncustodial fathers using armed force. One typical perception of the respondents was that some abductors reportedly acted for purposes of revenge, rather than out of affection for the child. A second group acted out of a wish to be pursued, something the authors call the "chase me" theme. The excitement for these parents was in part to recreate the seduction of the courtship. Again, a desire to be with the children was secondary. Among a third group, parents abducted because they had psychologically merged with the child in an unhealthy sense. Here, the child plays a disproportionately strong role in the abducting parent's life, and the parent left behind is viewed as the enemy. Less frequently seen was the fourth group where the father and mother had reversed traditional roles during the marriage and the father's involvement was not given its fair accord by the courts in a custody decision. Finally, a fifth group of abductors acted out of fear for the child's safety. Agopian (1980; 1981), in an earlier review of 91 California cases where children had been abducted by parents reported a history of criminal activity among the abductors. Potentially confounding variables associated with other factors may have been at play, though, when criminality was being measured.

Janvier et al (1990) conducted a survey of five missing children's organizations and received 65 responses from searching parents, a slight majority of whom were male. They found kidnapping within the country to be more commonly attempted by



mothers and international kidnapping more common among fathers. Joint or shared custody was in effect in one third of the domestic cases, mother custody in another third, and the remainder were split between father custody and there being no custody order in effect. International kidnappings were more apt to involve this last category of married parents sharing custody (38%) with the remainder split between joint and maternal custody. Prior threats of abduction were made in almost half of the situations, and over three-quarters of the abductors were believed to have been helped by accomplices.

The parents left behind, when asked to choose words from a lengthy list that might describe the abductors, tended to say they were impulsive, revengeful, manipulative, and controlling (Janvier et al, 1990: 5). Abuse (both physical and mental) was cited in 60% of the relationships. The abductors were also described as having mental problems and as having come from dysfunctional families. Drug and alcohol abuse were noted in about one-quarter of the abductors' personal behavior.

Long, Forehand, and Zogg (1991) analyzed data from 86 calls to a national hotline designed to prevent child abduction. The callers who were considering abduction were split evenly between mothers and fathers with mothers more apt to have custody at the time of the call. Fifty-seven percent of the couples were divorced at the time of the telephone contact and domestic violence had characterized about half the marriages. The reasons the parents were considering abduction (n=37 for this item) were classified

into four main reasons - protection of the child (54%), desire to be with the child (46%), refusal by the other parent to comply with visitation order (32%), and dissatisfaction with court ordered visitation (21%). When the protection of the child was raised as a reason, it was because of concerns about emotional abuse (63%), physical abuse (32%), the other parent's abusing drugs (26%) and alcohol (21%), or sexual abuse (11%) (multiple responses were possible).

In a Canadian study of 12 searching parents and their recovered children, only a quarter of the children interviewed believed the abductor had "acted out of love." The children's general impression was that they were being used to get back at the other parent (Shipton, 1992).

Finkelhor et al's work (1991), based on a nationally representative random-digit dial telephone survey of over 10,000 households, yielded a sample of 104 households who were self-identified as affected by parental abduction, as contrasted with identification through police records. The abductions, described by the parents left behind, tended to involve single parents in their 30s, involved male abductors, and had the potential for occurring some years after the divorce. Abductions were likely to occur at the child's home, rather than while the child was with a neighbor, relative, or in an educational setting. Known sexual or physical abuse during the abduction was rare (less than 5%).

Johnston, Sagatun-Edwards, and Girdner (1993) are currently analyzing data from a federally funded study exploring risk factors

for family abduction in 630 cases (20 of which they interviewed in depth) known to two California counties. In a preliminary examination of the data, they hypothesize that families that are most at risk for abduction are those who have had prior "contact with the criminal justice system, are unmarried, have little income and education, and have concerns about the well-being of their child with the other parent." (p. 6). Psychological factors did not appear to play a significant role in differentiating families where there was an abduction from those where there was a divorce but no abduction.

#### Study Methodology: How the Study was Undertaken

Finding parents who qualified for the study and were willing to participate proved difficult. The respondents had to have abducted their children as defined, to not be in violation of a court order (i.e. they had been located and charges concerning the abduction were not pending), and to be willing to be interviewed. Whereas confidentiality was guaranteed, respondents were not promised that the parent left behind would not be able to recognize the particular case study that would be included, even though specifics about the case study would be significantly altered. While a target goal of 20 had been set, information was obtained from seventeen parents who satisfied the study criteria.

These 17 were found through a variety of sources. The primary and initial source of obtaining names was from the original study

of 371 searching parents (Greif & Hegar, 1993). As part of continuing work with those subjects, they were recontacted by graduate students, interviewed for additional information, and, if their child had been located, asked if the abductor could be approached for an interview. Out of approximately 180 parents who had located their children (some of their children were living with the abductor following location), initial permission was given to contact approximately 40 parents. The 140 who refused to give permission to contact the abductor did so for some of the following reasons: they did not want to stir up a dormant relationship with the abductor; they did not want to inflame an already acrimonious relationship; and they were worried about information being shared with the abductor, despite assurances to the contrary.

When the principal investigators called the 40 searching parents a few months later to get the names and numbers of the abductors, 15 of them refused to participate. Their reasons varied. Some had not understood the initial request to contact the abductor. Others had not understood what interviewing their ex-spouse would entail and how the information would be used. Still others reported that their situation had changed and they no longer wished to have anything more to do with the abductor. The remaining 25 permitted contact with the abductor and supplied us with phone numbers and names.

Not all attempts to interview the abductors were successful. In a few of these instances, the telephone numbers were no longer valid and could not be updated. In other cases, the abductor

refused to participate and gave the following reasons - not wanting to go through the experience of talking about the abduction again and was trying to put it behind him; not trusting that the information would not get back to the other parent; not trusting the interviewer in a global sense; and being angry at the searching parent for giving out his name and number. This left a pool of 13 abductors.

The four other respondents came from sources outside of the survey population. One was gained through contacts with missing children's organizations who suggested people who might be willing to be interviewed. The other three came from personal contacts garnered from speaking engagements to organizations concerned with the legal rights of parents.

The interviews, all of which were initially conducted on the telephone, usually took between 90 and 180 minutes depending upon the circumstances of the abduction and the loquaciousness of the respondent. Respondents were paid \$50 for their time. Respondents could terminate the interview at any time and still receive their fee, though none did so.

From the high number of refusals to participate in the study, a great deal was learned from both parties about the on-going conflicts in these relationships even after the abduction has been resolved. In the vast majority of cases, there is a high degree of tension and conflict that continues for years. IT IS A POTENTIALLY SERIOUS LIMITATION OF THE STUDY THAT THE CASES PRESENTED HERE ARE NOT REPRESENTATIVE OF PARENTAL ABDUCTIONS CASES BECAUSE THEY ARE

DRAWN PRIMARILY FROM A GROUP OF LEFT BEHIND PARENTS WHO WERE WILLING TO HAVE US CONTACT THEIR EX-SPOUSES AND FROM ABDUCTORS WHO WERE WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED. What these case studies do provide are 17 separate windows to the abductions from the abductors' points of view. In addition to presenting this seldom glimpsed perspective, the case studies draw from material provided by the parents left behind and utilize the typology of abductions previously presented. It should be noted that, in some cases, extensive information available from the parent left behind does not agree with the information presented by the abductor. In other cases there is general agreement.

#### Findings from the Interviews

The findings are divided into 11 sections. It is recognized that some readers will be more interested in the demographic information whereas those who are more enforcement focus may be more interested in the abduction-related findings.

#### Demographic background

The 17 abductors were nine males and eight females ranging in age from 20 to 50, and having an average age of 35. Twenty-six children were taken with an age range from one to 13 and an average age of 5.6. With the exception of one Hispanic woman born in

Puerto Rico, all the respondents were from the majority culture. One white male had had an inter-racial marriage with an African. Sixteen were living in the U.S. at the time of their interviews, with the 17th residing in Central America remarried to a man from there. The amount of education completed at the time of the abduction ranged from 10th grade to one abductor holding a Ph.D., with 10 having at least some college education. There was also a great variation in the incomes of the abductors, from two being on welfare to others earning upper middle-class incomes. Their employment varied from two occupying the role of housewife and househusband, to some being secretaries, to others being engineers, construction workers, salespeople, and a professor. At the time of the abduction, a few had steady jobs that made it difficult for them to leave, but most had jobs that were either transferable or to which they were not particularly tied. Only one abductor (who never went into hiding) was employed at the pinnacle of his field. Six of the respondents were raised as Baptists or born-again Christians, six were Protestants, three were Catholics, one was Mormon and one was Jewish.

The length of the abductions lasted from one week to 11 years, with an average duration of approximately two years. In addition, the time elapsed since the abduction was resolved varied greatly from nine months to 11 years, with the average time being approximately six and a half years.

Eight of the respondents did not have custody at the time of the abduction, seven had joint or shared custody, one had sole

custody, and one said that custody had been assumed by a Juvenile Court, though physical custody was with the parent left behind. Reported acts of domestic violence, defined broadly to include anything from a single physical act to a long-standing pattern of abuse, was present in eight of the 17 marriages (two relationships were nonmarital). The abductor admitted to being the sole perpetrator in two of the relationships, a participant in violence in four of them, and the victim in two others. Only one abductor had a pre-abduction criminal history.

#### Psychological tests

Three psychological tests were administered over the telephone, the Beck Depression Inventory (short form) (Gould, 1982) which measures level of depression, The State-Trait Anger Scale (Spielburger, Jacobs, Russell, & Crane, 1983) which measures anger, and the Acceptance of Marital Termination Scale (Kitson, 1992) which examines attachment following divorce. The results of all three tests were nonsignificant with only a handful of the abductors recording any signs of depression, anger, or attachment. In looking at the results, we were aware of the potential impact of elapsed time since the abduction in drawing conclusions.

#### Significant childhood history

The respondents were asked about the nature of their



experiences in their families of origin. Six spent some time in a single parent family. Six described being physically or sexually abused during childhood, though the perpetrator of this abuse was not always a family member. Five of the respondents said that at least one of their parents had an alcohol or drug problem. Two respondents, both female, experienced all three of the above (single parent family, abuse, alcohol or drug problem) while two others (also both females) experienced two of the above. Six witnessed violence between their parents. A few experienced the death of key family figures when they were young. In fact, only five experienced none of the above. There were successes and failures in school with nearly two-thirds describing themselves as average or poor students. Religious practices were present in almost all of the homes, with five describing their religious backgrounds as particularly important to their families' identities. Some were raised with particularly clear ideas about right and wrong, leading to a moral development that made committing an abduction (i.e. a crime) especially bothersome to their values.

#### Significant marital history

The courtships of the abductors varied a great deal. Some cohabitated with their future spouses for many years before getting married, while others had whirlwind romances ending quickly in marriage. For some it was not their first marriage, while a few

others married people who had been previously married. Four married in part because of a pregnancy. Some were aware of alcohol or drug problems that had emerged during the courtship. Premarital violence also was cited occasionally. What attracted people to each other varied from their shared drug history, to shared work interests, to mutual attraction to an alternative lifestyle. Loneliness and attraction to the other partner's family were also cited as reasons. Respect and love were mentioned only occasionally as the reason for the marriage. Naturally, as these were marriages that ended in divorce, they were not depicted as happy ones for more than an initial period of time. As mentioned, eight abductors characterized their marriages as having at least one significant act of domestic violence. Counselling was tried on occasion by some of the couples, with sustained interest in it rarely shown by both partners.

It is interesting to note that about half of these abductors had marriages that changed significantly or ended because of the birth of children. In some cases, the abductor did not want the child to grow up under the other parent's influence or concern was expressed that a drug abusing lifestyle was not healthy for their newborn. In other instances, the abductor was unhappy with in-laws' involvement with a child, with the change in lifestyle that having a child demanded. In still other cases, the abductor complained about neglectful behavior that began with the birth of a child. In essence, the abductor could not tolerate parenting with the other parent.

The actual reasons the marriages ended are similar to those given by searching parents in other studies. Infidelity was mentioned in about one-third of the cases, a desire for lifestyle change caused the rift slightly less often, and emotional incompatibility and drugs were cited occasionally. Among those who divorced because of lifestyle differences, it appears that several entered marriages with clear assumptions concerning a desire to follow either an alternative lifestyle (best conceptualized as a communal approach to life) or, a highly traditional one. After a few years, they found that either they or their spouse wanted something more traditional (in the first instance) or less traditional (in the second instance).

#### Relationship with children during the marriage

To some extent, one parent's involvement in rearing children is balanced by the other parent's involvement. Five out of nine males indicated that their involvement with their children increased specifically because of their wife's reduction in involvement or her withdrawal. In one of these cases though, the father felt he needed to "save" his children from his in-laws who were playing too great a role. Of these five abducting fathers, one had even become a househusband, taking over all of the parenting responsibilities while his wife worked outside of the home. Three others said their wives showed no interest in parenting or were incompetent. This investment in parenting, based

on the mother's actions, may have played a key role in their later abducting the children. Three of the other four abducting males depicted themselves as being close to their children, typical of what their impressions of fathers' involvement should be. They felt no need to fill in as parent for an uninvolved mother. The ninth father increased his involvement after the divorce.

The abducting mothers also presented a mixed picture. Two of the mothers described themselves as not especially interested in children initially and only becoming so over time. One of these mothers saw the father as competent while the other described him as abusive. A second group of three mothers stated they were the primary caretaker but that the fathers were involved to a fairly typical extent and that they were competent in that role. The final three mothers also saw their husbands as being involved to a typical extent but not competent in their parenting abilities.

Thus, for some of these parents, the children assumed a great importance during the marriage, either as a way of defining themselves or because they saw themselves as "saving" the child from the other parent. A few indicated a blurring of boundaries (an inability to separate their own emotions and lives from those of their children) or a great attachment to one or all of their children. In only three of the abductors' stories is it clear that the abductor was the distinctly less involved parent. Usually the abductor was the chief caretaker or was sharing that responsibility. This view fits in with the reasons some parents give for abducting their children.

### Reasons for abduction

Classifying the reasons the parents give for abducting their children is complicated, given the complex nature of their lives. Reading the case studies that follow the text will show that abduction often occurs as the result of one major event or a number of events or circumstances that turn against the abductor or are perceived by the abductor to be dangerous to the child.

Twelve of the 17 abductors reported some contact with the courts or with professionals like child protective services prior to the abduction and were unhappy with the results of those contacts. In six of those cases, the child was being abused, neglected, or was being subjected to what the abductor believed to be an unhealthy home environment when the child was with the parent left behind. For instance, a number of parents observed abuse-related marks on their children's bodies following visitation with the other parent. When this was reported to authorities, no clear help was forthcoming. These parents stated they had to act to save their children. This group was comprised of four men and two women. Some of the men, because of their experiences with authorities, felt that there was a bias against their reporting abuse because they were male (that is, a man would be the one to perpetrate abuse rather than report it). In five (three women and two men) of the other 12 cases, the parent believed the courts were making unfair decisions in terms of custody or visitation agreements. For example, one father had been the primary custodian during the marriage and was shocked when the judge turned over

custody to the mother who had been the breadwinner in the family. The father believed that she had contacts within the court system that enabled her to gain custody. One mother felt a whole town had turned against her because of a false allegation of infidelity and that it would be impossible to gain a fair custody hearing under those circumstances. In the twelfth case a mother had wanted custody of her children, both of whom were living with previous husbands, because she thought they would be happier living together with her in Central America.

Other, and sometimes multiple, reasons were also given by parents for abducting. In six cases, parents abducted their children following either an abduction or the threat of abduction by the other parent. Two fathers were angry at their ex-wives and kidnapped in hopes of getting the children back following what they considered an abduction. Two others wanted to have more contact with their children and thought that abducting them would be the only way to achieve their goals. One woman was fleeing a battering situation. Fear of losing custody to foster care while custody was being litigated was part of the reason two women snatched their children. Two fathers said they were influenced to abduct because their children asked to stay with them.

Some conclusions can be drawn from these interviews about the circumstances leading up to and the reasons for abductions. First, the abduction typology that we have constructed continues to be useful in understanding abduction-related situations with this new sample. No new pattern emerged at this time that needs to be

considered. Second, no clear psychological pattern emerged that would explain from the abductor's past history why someone abducts. Prior efforts have sought to identify psychological characteristics which would be useful. This area remains elusive. Third, the marriages of these couples tended to be marked by high conflict and, in eight cases, at least one reported, though unconfirmed, instance of violence. Fourth, a strong bond, perhaps stronger than average, was formed between the abductor and the child whereby the child took on central importance in the lives of some of the abductors. Fifth, two-thirds of the sample reported that they acted out of concern for the children and with the belief that the court and/or the child welfare system were not responsive to their needs. Sixth, a significant minority of abductions occurred as a result of a previous abduction and the abductors were acting, in part, as a reaction to that event. Seventh, some abductors admit to abducting for essentially selfish reasons while others continued to find it difficult to accept the act as kidnapping or abducting. They say they were protecting their children or "kid caring."

#### Events during the abduction

The preparation for the abduction varied a great deal, as did initial plans to hide. Preparation seemed to fall along a continuum. There were those who acted totally impulsively, some who acted with a few days of thought and under a great deal of stress, and those who considered their options objectively and

researched the possibilities for a significant period of time.

Of three abductors who acted impulsively, one father just picked up his child and began driving with no real thought about where he was going. Another father described the abduction as an act of passion and not well planned. A mother felt she had run out of options for protecting her children and left with Child Protective Services believing the children's father had been sexually abusive, even though she admitted she knew this was not true. Those who gave the abduction some limited thought made good on that decision within a week. One mother in this group had been battered and decided, with the support of her therapist, to leave when her husband left for work. Another woman had left before and returned and this time, when her husband went to a conference, decided to leave again. The three fathers in this group all left because of problems related to visitation.

When abductors took more time to plan their actions, they typically sold off possessions, researched where to go, and were missing for considerably longer periods of time than the rest of the abductors. They were also more apt to leave the country, which almost a third of the sample (N=5) did. One father, who was deeply disturbed over the abuse his sons were experiencing at the hands of their mother's boyfriends during visitation, first threatened he was going to abduct, rented an apartment in Canada, and slowly rid himself of possessions so that he would not have to work initially. A mother took her daughter and, with the full knowledge of her own family and with her own mother as a passenger, drove to another



state and set up housekeeping.

The 17 abductors, once they went on the run with their children, used a variety of means for staying hidden (as is illustrated in the case examples). In leaving, and during the time they were in hiding, the vast majority (16 out of 17) reported getting some help from friends or family to carry out their abduction or to remain in hiding. Only one person acted totally on his own and remained on his own. A few others acted spontaneously and alone and later were assisted. Six of the 17 hid their whereabouts from their parents (five of these six were male). In approximately half the cases, there was contact with the searching parent during the time the abductor was in hiding. The reason for the contact varied. Some abductors wanted to reassure the searching parent that the children were being well taken care of, whereas others used communication as a diversionary tactic to throw off the search. For example, one father had friends send letters to the mother from all over the world so that the mother would think they were out of the country.

Name changing was common. First or last names were changed in about two-thirds of the cases. Also in about two-thirds of the cases, the abductor found work while on the run. As might be expected, changing a child's name and finding work were coincident with longer term abductions. Six of the 17 lived in at least two different places while the remainder stayed essentially in one location. Four of the 17 left the country - one to Canada, one to Africa, and two to central or South America.

### How located and consequences

Of the 17 abductors, eight were tracked down and found, six eventually turned themselves in, and three never attempted to hide their whereabouts. There was no relationship between the gender of the abductors or how long they were missing and the manner in which the child was recovered.

The eight who were tracked down were found through various methods. One mother was tracked down by the FBI through tracing a letter. One was reported to the children's father by her new boyfriend's ex-wife. A third mother was found by her ex-husband and a private investigator who trailed her parents. A fourth mother was recognized while working at a convention center four years after she first left. The four fathers who were located were turned in either by babysitters, or by someone else who knew them, or they were caught during police searches for other family members or while applying for a driver's license.

The six who turned themselves in offer a very different portrait. One mother who had successfully hidden for 11 years was driven by a sense of guilt and used the mediation service available from Child Find, Inc. Another mother turned herself in and returned to her home town because she feared that sharing custody would mean her children would have to travel great distances if she were located. She had not realized she had committed a crime. One father was convinced by a religious community he had joined that he should surrender after people in the community became aware through posters they saw that he was in hiding. A second father who had

turned his children over to friends for a week during a custody battle told the police where they were in the belief that they would not be returned to his ex-wife (which they were.) A third father who had gone overseas tired of being in hiding and thought his teen-age son would be better off educated in the United States. The fourth father turned himself in when he learned there was a felony warrant out for him. Some of the parents in this group were the most likely of all the abductors to feel some contrition about their acts.

Of the three who were not attempting to hide, one continued to work as a professor, one went to her parents' house in a different state, and one invited the fathers of the two children she abducted to visit them out of the country.

Once located, 13 spent at least some time in jail (a 14th was given probation) with the length of incarceration varying from a few hours to nine months (6 weeks was the average.) Four fathers who did not have custody at the time of the abduction served the longest time in jail, ranging from three to nine months. One of those fathers had abducted his children for one week and had revealed their location to the police. No mother spent longer than a week incarcerated. Approximately one-third of the sample paid a fine (some of which were minimal) with one mother, who took her children out of the country ordered to pay restitution of \$16,000.

### Current relationship with children and searching parent

It is not always the case that located children return to the searching parent. In eight of the situations the abductor received either sole or joint custody. In the other nine cases custody resides (or resided immediately after the recovery) with the searching parent. No connection was found between the length of the abduction, the gender of the abductor, or the gender of the child and the likelihood that the abductor would gain custody after location. The relationship the abductors describe having with their children tends to depend on who has custody. All of the abductors who have sole custody describe their parent-child relationship in positive terms. The majority of abductors who are visiting parents are less sanguine. Some describe strained relationships, and others say they have no contact at all. In some cases the lack of contact is due to the searching parent's interfering or gaining all legal rights and forbidding contact. In others it is related to the children not wanting to see the abductor. One abductor has reconciled with her husband and all family members are under one roof.

The 27 children who were abducted (abductors did not always take all of their children) have, in some cases, suffered dramatically, while in others, have had virtually no problems. Examples of negative adjustments of children while on the run were not reported to us. Since recovery, though, the picture is different. While in no case does an abductor with custody say the

child is currently having major problems, noncustodial abductors do make such reports. One father who abducted three children reported that upon return one was agoraphobic and did not attend school. A second child was easily brought to tears and needed therapy. Another father who now has custody said only that his children first had problems when returned to the mother but now that they are with him have straightened out. A third father reported his children, who were living with their mother, "shuttered" whenever she was near them. A mother stated that her daughter became "super mature" upon return to the father, while the son was immature and displayed signs of delayed physical maturation. A second mother believed one of her daughters felt a great deal of guilt over having assisted with the abduction. Another daughter, with whom she did not have contact, was reportedly experiencing a great deal of emotional turmoil.

Do the abductors feel guilty? No, the vast majority feel their actions were justified. Of the three who do express guilt, all stated they were raised in a household with a clear emphasis on right and wrong and a religious component, though this did not differ significantly from the histories provided by those who did not express guilt. Clearly these parents had a strong moral development which may have, to some extent, helped them to justify their actions when they felt they were not receiving justice at the hands of the other parent or the court system. To some degree they saw their actions as civil disobedience.

Would they abduct again knowing what they know now? Eight said

they would do it again, and three said they would try harder to get custody legally, that they were glad they had done it but would not do it again, or that they regretted the lack of contact with their child now as a result of having kidnapped. Four said they would not do it again knowing what they know now, and two were uncertain. No clear trends emerged concerning the gender of the parent or the length of time in hiding in relation to the expression of guilt or resolving to repeat their actions.

#### A caution about the abducting parents' reports

In 13 of the 17 cases presented, we have in-depth information from the searching parent. This provides us with some of the first data gathered from both sides in an abduction and is a potential counterbalance to the stories presented by the abductors. However, when there are vast differences in the stories, it is difficult to know who is telling the truth. Finally, it should be remembered that the searching parents agreed to have us contact the abductor, so a greater amount of agreement would be expected than in cases where the searching parent refused to let us interview the abductor or the abductor refused to be interviewed.

In ten of the 13 cases, there is general agreement as to the circumstances of the abduction and the reasons for it, and in all 13 there is agreement as to who had custody at the time of abduction. Reports of domestic violence, though, are not consistent in three of these ten. For example, one male abductor

says he was violent only once, whereas his ex-wife says he was violent more often. One female abductor said there was no violence while her ex-husband claims she was violent. The ex-husband of an abductor who claimed to be the victim of violence reported that she would accuse him of violence, but did not admit to violence himself. In the other seven cases, there was general agreement with minor discrepancies. For example, one abductor claimed he abducted because of the unseemly nature of the company his ex-wife kept with men who were a bad influence on his children. The ex-wife says that the abductor flew off the handle easily and was very jealous of the men she dated. Both are speaking the truth from their perspective.

In the three cases where there was great disagreement about a number of facts, all centered around male abductors. According to their ex-wives, the abductors were more violent and more heavily involved with drugs than they described themselves. Yet in one of these cases, the ex-wife, after feeling her children were exposed to a range of deviant sexual behavior as well as improper firearm use, ended up voluntarily turning the children over to the father because of her work schedule.

What these 13 cases point out is the complexity involved in attempting to learn the motivations behind the actions of parents involved in abduction. The differences between the parents' reports run from the minor to the extreme.

## Application of the Typology of Abductions

We see potential to support and expand on the earlier discussion about the typology of abductions in light of the responses of some of the searching parents. The violent visitor was the most common pattern seen in our earlier research, and, it remained common among this sample, with four of the 17 cases typed in that manner, according to the abductors. If we were to include statements by the searching parent, a fifth case could be considered here. All four of the abductors in this category are male (the fifth would be also). Three of the four said they were participating in a violent relationship and were not the sole perpetrator. Three of the four were acting out of a desire to protect the child or be with the child, not as a means for revenge as suggested by the searching parents' reports.

The nonviolent visitor type was also seen in four of the abductions. This tended to be a male dominated category with only one female abductor. (An additional male abductor could be typed in the above group if his ex-wife's story is believed rather than his.) All four of these abductors acted in part out of a desire to be with their child, an answer that is consistent with the typology as discussed earlier.

Nonviolent shared custodians are also amply represented, with four such situations. Three of the abductors in this category are women (as in the earlier research) and the four abductors' ex-spouses confirm the lack of violence in the relationships making



this the cleanest category in terms of agreement between abductors and searching parents. Three of these four parents clearly acted out of a desire to be with the child, also an answer that is consistent with the typology research.

Violent shared custodians had one representative. This father maintained that he was accused of manhandling his ex-wife one time whereas his ex-wife claims she was the victim of serious battering. He acted out of a fear of losing control, as had been outlined previously in the discussion of the typology.

Finally, there was one sole custodian abduction which entailed no violence according to both parties. This was a mother who was fearful of her children having contact with the father because of his emotional instability.

Three female abductors with shared custody said they had been be victims of domestic violence that occurred anywhere from one time after the separation to many times during the marriage. This was not always substantiated by their ex-spouses. Yet, as mentioned above, when talking about the circumstances around the abduction, searching parents may downplay their own role as perpetrators of violence. If these women are to be believed, violence was part of the reason for their leaving in two of the cases and the sole reason in the third. Where violence was not the sole reason, the two acted out of a desire to be with the child. These abductors represent a group that was believed to be underrepresented in our earlier study - the nonviolent visitor and the nonviolent shared custodian where it is an abusive spouse who

is not reporting his or her own violence.

It was also found that people who spent the most time in jail were fathers who were visiting and reported participating in domestic violence.

### Summary and Implications

The current study was undertaken to learn, through extensive interviews, the histories, motivations, location-related factors, and current life situations of 17 parents who abducted their children. Due to the small and limited sample, investigators are cautioned against drawing investigation themes from these few parents and are encouraged to look for additional sources. Major summary points are given first:

- THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE ABDUCTORS DO NOT FEEL GUILTY
- ALMOST HALF SAID THEY WOULD ABDUCT AGAIN
- THE TYPOLOGY CONTINUES TO BE USEFUL IN UNDERSTANDING ABDUCTORS
- PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS CONTINUE TO BE ELUSIVE AS PREDICTORS OF ABDUCTION
- ALMOST TWO-THIRDS OF THE ABDUCTORS HAD ENTERED INTO THE COURT OR PROFESSIONAL SERVICE SYSTEM PRIOR TO THE ABDUCTIONS

The nine male and eight female abductors were, with one exception, white and ranged in age from 20 to their early 50s at

the time of the abductions. Childhoods of the abductors were marked by some instances of child abuse and exposure to other potential risk factors like divorce, witnessing domestic violence, family alcoholism, and the deaths of key family members. School histories tended to be marked by poor or average performance and work histories revealed employment in jobs that did not require a great deal of formal education.

During the marriages, five of the fathers described themselves as very involved with their children as a result of their wives' withdrawal. Three mothers viewed their husbands as being incompetent parents. Domestic violence marked eight of the 17 marriages. Infidelity was mentioned as the reason for the marital breakup in one-third of the marriages. Custody was shared or had not been determined in seven of the relationships, with the abductors being the noncustodial parent in eight others at the time of the abduction. One abductor had custody and in the 17th situation custody was in the process of being turned over to the Juvenile court.

The reasons given for the abduction varied. Nearly two-thirds had sought recourse through the courts or from professionals and believed the decisions were going to go against them. In six of these cases, the abductor believed the child was being abused or neglected, and that concern motivated their actions. Six parents acted following either an abduction by the other parent or the threat of abduction. Fear of losing custody, contact with the child, or control within a relationship were also motivating

factors. A bias against males in the court system was mentioned occasionally. A few parents acted for what appear to be purely selfish reasons. While the length of the abduction ran from one week to 11 years and involved 26 children, these tended, with three exceptions, to be abductions of fairly long duration, rather than short-term ones resolved within a week.

Eight abductors were tracked down, six turned themselves in, and three claimed never to have been in hiding. Thirteen of the abductors spent some time in jail as a result of the abduction with 6 weeks being the average length of incarceration. One-third paid some restitution. Eight currently have sole or joint custody. Searching parents' reports, available on 13 of the 17, agree in most instances about the circumstances during the abduction, with the greatest disagreements surrounding the prevalence of domestic violence during the marriage. Five of the one-time searching parents have concerns about future abductions.

#### Implications

The following implications for law enforcement, mental health professionals, and missing children's organizations emerge from the study:

1. Many abductors justify their actions on the grounds that they tried to increase or gain custody through the established procedures (usually the court system) and that those routes were

blocked or unresponsive. In essence, these parents did what they thought they should do but it did not help. Some concluded from this real or perceived response that the courts are biased against their gender or are susceptible to being co-opted by a person of influence or position.

Some abductors justify their actions with the belief that their children are being harmed and that they personally must protect them. Most of these parents have gone to child protective services for assistance in protecting their children and been unsatisfied with the response.

Parents seeking custody, visitation, or protection through the court system are clearly at risk for abducting. This may be particularly true when they have little to lose in terms of jobs or living situations.

It is interesting to speculate further about a possible connection between children being perceived as the cause of a marital breakup and being at the center of later illegal actions such as abduction. If the child is seen as important enough to have caused the breakup, we can assume the child would be important enough to kidnap. Thus, marriages where the child has caused a major shift in the marital relationship may also be those that, when a custody dispute arises, are more apt to end in abduction.

Some parents were not aware that they had committed a felony and were fairly easily convinced to return when they were contacted by the police. Special programs for parents in hotly contested custody battles may be effective in preventing some abductions.

Such programs, delivered through lecture or pamphlet, could focus on:

- a) acknowledging the pain and difficulties associated with contested custody battles;
- b) educating about the risks to children of abduction;
- c) describing the legal consequences of abduction;
- d) directing parents to services and supports that might help them resolve their problems, i.e. child custody mediation, domestic violence programs, etc.

In addition, a closer working relationship between divorce courts and the child protective service system may enable coordination in custody cases where child abuse or neglect have been alleged.

2. The typology of abductions proved valuable as an illustrative way of thinking about abduction-related situations. It also proved to be a predictor of time spent in jail, with noncustodial visiting fathers who report being a participant in domestic violence serving the most time in jail upon their capture. This finding has various possible interpretations. It could mean that the disproportionate amount of time spent by abducting fathers in jail when compared with mothers is the result of biases against men. At the same time, the amount of time spent in jail may be an appropriate reflection of the facts of the case where domestic violence has occurred.

The typology helps professionals involved in the field to have

a common language. Until further information invalidates it, it should continue to be used.

3. As a sizeable number of abductors were known to court personnel and professionals before the abduction, these practitioners should consider instituting innovative programs for targetting this population and for changing behaviors that may lead to abduction.

4. Attempts at the location of abducting parents should continue to focus on parents of the abductor as well as his or her circle of friends. Most abductors were helped at some point by one of these two groups.

5. A number of abductions were resolved in the course of other kinds of arrests, criminal investigations, and routine records checks. This suggests that education of local police and clerks involved in establishing identification should continue to focus on the importance of referencing National Crime Information Center (NCIC) as part of background checks. In addition, it suggests the need to keep information concerning parental abduction in a national system and up to date.

6. In a similar vein, five of the 17 abductors crossed international borders. Continued cooperation between governments and international agencies working on abduction is clearly warranted.

7. Finally, a diverse response is needed from the legal profession, law enforcement, and other court-related personnel to abductions. As can be seen, the roots and consequences of abduction vary a great deal. More information is clearly needed as these 17 offer only an anecdotal examination of these issues. Each case needs an idiosyncratic response that considers the context.



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## CASE STUDIES

### Case #1

Background- Mark is a 39 year old white male with a high school diploma who has worked all his life in the oil and chemical refineries of southeast Texas. Raised as a Baptist, he is now non-affiliated. He has only one child, a son Billy whom he abducted at age 4 for a period of 7 months. The reasons for the abduction (he did not have custody at the time) were that his ex-wife abducted first and he was unhappy with the company she was keeping, viewing her and her friends as immoral. He tried to increase visitation and failing that, left with his son. Billy is now 12 and in his mother's custody. He visits him regularly. Mark remarried one week before the interview and now has a 15 year old step-daughter.

Significant Childhood History - Mark was the middle of three boys whose mother died when Mark was four. At five, he lost the grandmother who was helping his father raise the boys. His father, a machinist in an oil refinery, married again two years after his first wife's death. Both father and step-mother, a registered nurse, worked regularly throughout Mark's childhood. The remarriage brought two step-siblings with it and also produced a younger half-sib. When Mark was 18, his younger brother was hit by a car and died.

Mark reports no substance abuse, child abuse, domestic

violence, or other criminal behavior in his childhood family. There were no abductions of children. He remembers arguments among the children and between his father and step-mother, noting "we're not ones to hide nothing." The family remained intact and Mark is on good, though not particularly close, terms with them. It was important to his step-mother that the family attend a Catholic church, so they did so throughout most of his childhood, without Mark feeling it was important to him. In response to a question about standards in his family, Mark replied he was taught "right is right and wrong is wrong," adding that he knew at the time the abduction was wrong. Mark reports being an average student.

Significant Marital History - Mark had been married once before his relationship with Billy's mother, as had she. He gave no details of his first marriage, which produced no children. She had married young the first time, after getting pregnant in high school. Her son from her first marriage lived primarily with her parents. Mark's wife became pregnant shortly after their marriage, which lasted only a year and a half. Both worked. While he did not accuse her of infidelity during the marriage, he noted her history with several men afterwards. Mark thought that his wife sometimes drank too much, but he reported no history of violence, sexual problems, criminal behavior, or isolation during the marriage.

Relationship with Children during Marriage - Mark's wife allowed Billy to spend much of his time and receive much of his care from

her parents who lived in the next house, and this became a major source of conflict between her and Mark. Because they didn't like or approve of him, Mark didn't want them raising Billy. Billy was only 1 when they split up, and Mark describes a scene where he asked the child in front of his mother and grandmother who each was. He identified his grandmother as "Nanna-Momma" and his mother by her first name, helping Mark make his point that the child didn't even know they were his parents. In the interview, Mark also expressed concern repeatedly about his step-son. Although that boy's father visited him and has paid child support for years, Mark also has a relationship with him and still feels concern for him. However, because the boys were very young and mostly in the control of their grandparents, Mark does not seem to have been very involved with them up until the breakup of the marriage.

Reasons for Abduction - After the marriage ended out of mutual discontent, there was a period of 2 to 3 years when the mother had custody and Mark had visitation on a regular, every-other-weekend schedule. When Mark asked his divorce attorney about the custody options, he was told not to fight his wife's getting custody initially, but to "wait until your son is older, maybe get remarried yourself, then maybe try to change it." Mark was ordered to pay support and states that he was up to date at the time of the abduction, paying about \$40/week.

Mark believes his ex-wife lied consistently at every court hearing, and that her behavior was bad for both boys. She was

living with a man the summer of the abduction, then he caught her with another man of a different thnic background. About this time, Billy was scheduled to spend Easter with him, and his ex-wife reneged on that agreement. Mark reports that she hid to avoid him and for 2 months he did not know Billy's whereabouts. He hired a private investigator, found her, set up a meeting, brought a friend along for support and help, and took his son away. I wouldn't have intervned if she had been a better mother."

At the time of the abduction, Mark was supposed to have visits on 1st and 3rd weekends, for 2 weeks in the summer, and on assorted holidays. However, his ex put all sorts of barriers in the way. Mark thought there was no hope of getting a fairer deal from the courts, although what he really wanted was access to his son, not custody: "if she'd just let me see my son, it would be fine." During this time, Mark sees his ex as "having no morals" in her relationships with men, running up debts and expecting others to pay, and having credit, and possibly other legal, problems. Following several affairs, she married for the third time.

Mark did seek help before taking Billy, going to legal aid and other attorneys and private investigators. He reported the mother to child protection twice, believing that the children were afraid of her boyfriends and that she occasionally got drunk.

Events during Abduction - Beginning during a visit, Mark kept Billy and left the state, taking him first on a 2-week vacation to DisneyWorld. They then went to a new locale where Mark had a male

Figure  
Table 1. Five Patterns of Parental Abduction of Children

Characteristics	Violent visitor (28%)	Nonviolent visitor (18%)	Nonviolent shared custodian (15%)	Violent shared custodian (11%)	Custodian (12%)
Custody status	searching parent	searching parent	shared	shared	abductor
Abductor violent	yes	no	no	yes	no
Abductor gender	83% male 17% female	43% male 57% female	21% male 79% female	68% male 32% female	24% male 76% female
Typical reasons for breakup	violence; substance abuse	incompatibility; abductor's problems	abduction	spouse abuse	incompatibility
Typical reasons for abductions	to hurt searching parent	desire to be with child	unhappy with visits	fears loss of contact/control	pressure from others
Use of force in abduction likely	yes	no	no trend	yes	no

*Note.* Characteristics are based on responses from searching parents. Not every case could be classified successfully and a sixth pattern, violent custodians, was excluded from the analysis because their numbers were too small.



friend to stay with. He had about \$4000.00 to start with, and he found construction work. Billy started preschool and was enrolled in an after-school program. They used a different last name, and Billy "went along" with this. He changed his social security number in order to work and told the preschool he had custody. Billy did not ask for his mother and seemed to do well.

Mark never saw the abduction as justifiable. He said repeatedly that it had been wrong, but he was desperate. He says, "I felt sorry for Billy; he had two bad parents instead of one." He was not in contact with his family.

How Recovered - After 7 months, Mark called his parents and was told there was a felony warrant out for him. He decided then to go back, rather than make matters worse. He talked to Billy and explained that they had to go home. Mark said in this context, "I made a promise to him, cause I lost my mother, not to hurt his mother." Billy was about the same age during the abduction and return as Mark had been when his mother and grandmother died.

Mark and Billy returned to his parents' house in Texas, and his father accompanied him as he gave himself up to authorities. Billy saw nothing disturbing. There was a hearing, he posted bond, and eventually there was a plea bargain. He received 3 years probation and was ordered to make restitution, which he paid off.

Current Relationship with child and searching parent - Immediately after the recovery, Billy didn't want to see Mark because he had

been told his father had done a horrible thing. Within 6 months, though, visits were reinstated by the court, which Mark sees as recognition that his ex-wife also had problems as a parent. At first the visits were supervised, at their house and Mark brought a witness each time. A few months later, they reverted to the schedule in the divorce decree, and that is how they remain.

Mark thinks he has a good relationship with Billy. The abduction rarely comes up anymore, but it is not a closed subject. His ex no longer fears abduction, but she is afraid Billy will ask to live with his father. Mark pays \$80/wk child support and resents his ex-wife's control and use of the money. Asked about Billy's sense of ethics, Mark said "he had a pretty liberal outlook on right and wrong. He likes to get away with things." Mark sees this as normal for a 12 year old and he is not worried about his son, who has never been in any real trouble.

Mark is generally content and feels he is doing well. He is very happy about his new marriage. Some of his current friends do know about the abduction. He gives the feeling of someone who has moved away emotionally from the events, although he cares very much about his son. Asked if he would abduct again in the same circumstances he says "I don't know. Knowing what I know now, I could have done things to help me legally."

Case #2

Background - Lee is a 48 year old white male with about 13 years of

formal education, working as a self-employed computer consultant. His ethnic heritage is Jewish but he is a committed Quaker. He abducted his son in an attempt to maintain custody of him (custody was shared at the time), which he believed he would lose if he and his wife broke up. He and his son were in hiding for 13 months. He has seen his son only two or three times after the recovery, and has no contact with the 12-year-old now.

Significant Childhood History - Lee's parents worked in retail sales before his mother stayed home to take care of Lee and his younger sister. Due to his father's work, the family lived in 5 states in different regions of the country while Lee was growing up. For a time, his father ran his own small business in Dallas, and at that time he was home more, but it was not financially rewarding. Lee's father died of a heart attack brought on by stress and heavy smoking when Lee was 17. His mother never remarried.

There was no history of legal problems, child abuse, domestic violence, or marital separations or abduction in Lee's family. He believes that his father's self-destructive smoking was a type of substance abuse, but his parents drank alcohol rarely and used no other drugs.

Lee describes a close but troubled nuclear family. Although his father was away a lot, they did things together when he was home. There were family picnics, dinners, annual family vacations. Asked about how anger and aggression were handled in his family,

Lee said "those didn't exist. As I was growing up, one didn't become angry. Denial." Later he commented that he could remember very little of his childhood, perhaps because it was unhappy. There was significant emphasis on ethics in his family, and Lee seems to have felt in a bind about moral issues. Although both of his parents were Jewish, they came from families with different levels of observance. They were non-observant and non-affiliated during most of his growing-up years, in part, Lee believes, because his father's work would have made anything else difficult.

Lee had a relatively stable school experience, completing 7th through 11th grades in Columbus with a good group of friends. Lee was "bright enough not to have to study, a National Merit finalist who didn't make great grades." He started college studying math and physics at Lehigh but dropped out.

Significant Marital History - Lee met Susie in Cleveland at a Quaker meeting, where, in his mid-20's, he "found a spiritual home." She revealed something very personal in speaking at the meeting, and he introduced himself and offered support. They became friends. He liked and admired her family tremendously, had done so at a distance even before meeting her. It was his third or fourth serious relationship.

Later they lived together while she studied English and he drove a taxi. They moved to Cincinnati so she could attend graduate school, and he spent weekdays in Cleveland where he could continue to work. He sold books, then was hired by a University

photo lab where he worked for more than eight years.

They married in 1975 and separated in 1978. Sexual problems, including different levels of interest and need, were part of the problem. Susie became pregnant while they were separated, and Lee believed it occurred one evening when she came over to console him over the death of a friend and mentor. Upon learning of the pregnancy, Lee wanted a reconciliation. He still had deep feelings for her and saw this as an opportunity to try again. They moved together into a house, and she insisted that her friend Perry also live with them. He knew and liked Perry and his family (they had all been friends for some time), and he agreed although he knew they were lovers. When Eric was born in 1980, he believed the child to be his because Susie led him to think so and because their sexual reunion nine months previously made it possible. In the house they shared, he and Susie had one bedroom, while Perry had another.

Late in the relationship, they argued, sometimes grabbed or shook the other, and Susie accused him of manhandling her. No one in the household was involved with drugs, criminal behavior, or substance abuse.

Relationship with Children During Marriage - Lee was present at Eric's birth (Perry was not.) Lee describes himself as an involved father during the first 2 1/2 years of Eric's life, although Susie was one who was with him during the day and provided most of the care. At home, all three adults helped with household and

childcare tasks. Eric called Lee "Daddy" and called Perry by name.

Reasons for Abduction - As the relationship deteriorated, Lee became afraid that Susie would leave with Eric, obtain custody, and keep him from having contact. Someone in their circle of friends suggested to him that Susie might be planning to have Perry legally recognized as Eric's father. Lee admits that he also wanted desperately to hold on to Susie. They did use mediation for 3 or 4 sessions, as they talked about separation, but much more was needed to support this relationship.

One day, Lee took Eric with him to Cleveland and just drove around trying to think of what to do. He thought of going to the Friend's meeting house they used to attend to ask someone for help, but he didn't, though he has wished ever since that he had.

Events during Abduction - Lee drove south, first to a university town in Missouri where he thought he could find computer work. That didn't last long, and he went on to Atlanta where they spent a year. He did home repairs and handyman work, taking Eric along to his jobs, where there were often elderly people who were glad to help watch him. He rented a room, worked for cash, and tried not to leave much of a trail.

Asked about whether the abduction was justified in his own eyes, Lee replied as follows:

"At the time, I wasn't evaluating what I was doing. At one

point, I was trying to establish communication with Susie and but sent a letter asking that an ad appear, and I would answer. My mother-in-law answered with a proverb: "you have many years to live; do things you will be proud to remember when you are old." I remember breaking down and weeping when I read that, and that was the closest I came to calling home, or going back. I feel great awe and shame that I could not convince myself to do what I knew was the right thing to do."

During the abduction, he called his mother a couple of times, and she tried to both say he was doing the wrong thing and to be supportive. Since she didn't get along with Susie, she didn't have much credibility; just hearing her criticism of Susie made him feel loyal to her. His mother didn't know where he was calling from. One other person helped with money and advice during the abduction.

Eric was not in school and never needed a doctor, so there were few problems. Eric didn't cry for Susie or act sad, although he occasionally asked questions. One thing Lee really regrets is that he told others, then eventually Eric, that his mother was dead. He describes this as a gradually growing lie he got stuck with as more people heard it.

How Recovered - Lee was apprehended by police in Atlanta. He was attending a family picnic with friends, and the police raided it, looking for someone's brother who was wanted on drug charges. They arrested the suspect and left, but they had checked license plates,

and found a warrant out for Lee. Eric saw him arrested, and the police let him wait with Eric until a child protection worker arrived to take him to a foster home. Lee spent a week in jail in Georgia, then a month in Ohio. Ohio did not have a parental kidnapping statute at the time, and he eventually was released.

Current relationship with Child and Searching Parent - During Lee's absence, Susie had established Perry's paternity of Eric, divorced Lee, and married Perry. They are still together as a family. Lee has seen Eric only three times since the abduction, all a long time ago. He has no legal rights, and he had to agree not to seek contact in order to have charges against him dismissed. He was allowed a goodbye visit with Eric. Lee reports that Susie was afraid of another abduction, but she need not have been. He says "I went over the edge of realization of what I had done while I was in jail."

Lee knows very little about Eric now. He, Susie, and her family remain very active in Quaker circles, and he expects some day to run into them. He has encountered his former in-laws by accident, and he occasionally hears Susie's name mentioned by someone who doesn't know the connection. Lee remarried once, but is again divorced, with no children.

Case #3

Background - Al is 51 years old, the father of a son and daughter age 23 and 21. He is a white university professor who was raised



as a Presbyterian and now attends a Unitarian church. He abducted his daughter with the help of his aunt when his ex-wife refused to grant him the visitation he was supposed to receive (he believes the mother thus abducted the child.) The aunt placed the child on the plane for a flight to his home. Al never hid his whereabouts and eventually won custody in court.

Significant Childhood History - Al grew up in a house with both parents and one younger sister. His father was a medical doctor, and his mother a housewife who later went to work as a librarian. He reports no significant losses, criminality, domestic violence, or child abuse in his family of origin. His father was always an irritable man, and at about age 13 Al realized his father was a "closet alcoholic," who drank quietly and was able to maintain his work and family life. Family members were involved with each other on the surface, eating meals together and taking family vacations, but emotional closeness was more elusive, particularly with his father. As a boy, Al found school easy and made good grades. The family was not devoutly religious.

Significant Marital History - While a graduate student at Columbia, Al was an usher at the New York Opera where he met his future wife, who worked as a secretary. She was the first woman he considered marrying. After a courtship of about a year and a half, they married. She came from an affluent Irish Catholic family of seven children, and initially said she wanted a similarly large family.

When they married, Al promised to raise their children as Catholics, but, after his wife later left her church, their two children were brought up protestant. Al believes that their major differences were rooted more in social class than in anything else; he describes her background as "lower upper-class" and his own as "upper-middle class."

There were no criminal or legal problems during the marriage, and no abuse of substances. Al admitted grabbing and shaking his wife on one occasion. They fell over onto a rickety chair, which broke. She was the one who eventually became dissatisfied with the marriage over issues like his contribution to house work and his sarcastic, cutting remarks. Al says he changed his behavior, but the marriage continued to deteriorate. One possible reason was his wife's involvement in the mid-1970s in a "women's lib" group that led to the eventual divorce of all the married participants. As the marriage unraveled, they sought help from counseling and Al says that his wife discontinued attendance at some of these sessions after she seemed to give up on the marriage.

Relationship with Children during Marriage - Both Al and his wife felt having children was "the thing to do," since most couples in the early 1970s did. Parenthood was "quite" important to Al, though taken-for-granted as an expected part of life. The children were 4 and 5 at the time the couple separated. Al's academic job allowed him the time flexibility to help with childcare. He recalls fixing many or most breakfasts and often putting the

children to bed, for example. At this time, he remembers his son's relationship with both parents as being easy and untroubled, while his daughter was closer to him than to his wife. There were never any allegations of child abuse by either parent.

Reasons for abduction - The initial family separation came when he took an academic job in New York. His wife continued to live in the mid-west with their daughter, while their son, 5, moved east with him, in part so the boy could start kindergarten in a state that offered it. The family reunited on holidays for a few months, but the work-related separation eventually became a marital separation. His wife got primary custody of both children, and his visitation was very liberal, although he did not have the money to arrange visits except for extended holidays, summer, etc. The decree stated that one school year out of four would be spent with him. Once, he had a sabbatical in England, and the children spent their summer with him there and attended English schools. Al paid child support except when the children were with him.

Although there were frequent disagreements about his visitation rights, scheduling, etc., the abduction incident (a label with which Al does not agree) did not occur until the children were 11 and 12. Al states that his daughter was due to come stay with him and that her mother would not allow it. He arranged by phone with the girl that she would leave school and meet his aunt, who had agreed to put her on the plane to his city.

Events during abduction - He was unaware at the time that this would be considered a felony, but he did discover soon that he was likely to be arrested. A warrant was issued, but it took several weeks for it to be served on him in a different state. He had continued to work at his university job, and his daughter was attending 5th grade. They made no efforts to hide or run, but he did file for sole custody of his daughter in the state where he lived. Her reasons for wanting to live with him, he says, were that she liked new and different places and experiences (she later spent her junior year of high school in Scotland), she had a better relationship with her father than with her mother, and that when in her mother's house she had bad dreams.

How recovered - Plainclothes police came to his office to arrest him. He had made prior arrangements with a neighbor to keep the girl at her house if, as he expected, he got arrested. He called the neighbor to alert her, and she took the daughter in. He was held for only two hours and was released on a personal recognizance bond. While the criminal charges were pending, his custody suit was heard, and he was granted sole custody of the girl (her brother remained in the mother's custody). The criminal charges were then dropped.

Al does not regard what he did as abduction. He thinks the abduction occurred when his ex-wife tried to prevent their daughter from having her scheduled visit with him. He feels that what he did was entirely justified, and in the same circumstances he would

do the same thing.

Current Relationship with Child and Searching Parent - For about 2 years after the custody change, his daughter did not visit with her mother. Each was angry at the other. After that, visits resumed. Their son remained in his mother's custody, their daughter in his, until they reached majority. Both are now young adults, and they see both of their parents, who now live in the same metropolitan area. The daughter is about to graduate from college. The son, who has graduated, lives with his mother and is looking for work.

#### Case #4

Background - David is a white male, age 39, who completed high school and has worked mostly in telephone maintenance. He now works for a wholesaler. Raised as a Baptist, he has been married 3 times and is the father of two daughters from the last two marriages, ages 3 and 6. The 6 year old was the child involved in the abduction, which occurred when she was 18 months old and lasted for four months. David, who had shared custody at the time, went into hiding because he was convinced his ex-wife was going to abduct first and he was very unhappy with the negative influence she was having on his daughter. He had shared custody at the time.

Significant Childhood History - David was raised by a single mother and his maternal grandparents after his father left the family when

he was 6 months old. He was the only child of that marriage, although he has 2 half-siblings whom he does not know well. When David was 6, his mother married the step-father who helped raise him. His stepfather drove a truck most of the time and did other jobs when he could. His mother worked as a secretary.

Until his mother's remarriage, she and David lived with her parents. His grandfather's death when he was seven was a big blow to David, because he had been the most significant male figure in his life. David describes his childhood as an average one, not marked by abuse, domestic violence, or substance abuse. The adults in his life were mildly religious, but church stayed in the background of his life. He does feel that his mother put lots of emphasis on morality and "doing the right thing."

David reports being an average student who didn't put much energy into school. He preferred playing his guitar, and he has played with jazz groups off and on since that time.

Significant Marital History - David was first married at a young age to an older woman with 3 children. He describes this relationship as his first real love, and he was very involved with her children, including coaching little league, etc. They were married 13 years, though not together all that time, and he still feels close to this woman and her family. Some of her relatives were helpful to him during the abduction.

At age 31 and recently divorced, David met his second wife in a bar. She was younger than he, which attracted him, and the

relationship moved quickly. Within three months they were living together, and they married soon thereafter because her daughter from a first marriage was returning from an extended visit away, and David did not want to live together outside marriage with a child in the house. David was strongly attracted to his second wife, and he quit the job that required him to travel and went to work managing a nightclub in order to be with her more. However, they really had not known each other well before marriage, and in many ways were incompatible. She quit work and pursued various business schemes that failed. She had declared bankruptcy several times, while David thought it wrong to avoid paying creditors. She was a poor housekeeper, and he was appalled that her 5 year old still wet the bed.

This was his wife's third marriage, and she kept getting letters from old boyfriends. They both used drugs (marijuana and cocaine), and David drank a lot of beer (as much as 12 cans at a time).

After about 15 months of marriage, their daughter, Renee, was born. He had wanted a child and wanted them to clean up their act and be a normal family. She quit using drugs while pregnant, but did not change in other ways he hoped for. David and his wife did seek help from a local Baptist minister, but his wife thought the minister "turned on her," and she would not go back. That was a pattern when people didn't take her side.

Relationship with Children during Marriage - David reports that

parenting was shared, and that he did a lot with Renee after working nights. David also mentioned that he frequently took her to his mother's house during the day, where both he and his mother would spend time with her. David says being a father "was most important thing in life. It made up for many past mistakes, a failed marriage, so I took it very seriously. It was a feeling and experience I had never known. I would die for her." However, he really didn't want her to grow up under her mother's influence. His wife's older daughter had no manners, and was learning to be a slob. His wife refused to change or to take better care of the girls.

Reasons for Abduction - "She had been hammering on me that she was sick with things the way they were, and that she would take Renee and her other daughter and leave. I decided one day to leave first. I didn't want Renee to grow up like her mother."

It was an "act of passion," not well planned, but the only choice he saw. He left her a note telling his wife not to worry and left with Renee, then 18 months old. He thought he couldn't get what he wanted in court because her dad was well connected. He needed time to think.

About working through the court system, David said: "Mothers get their children. Mothers have to be murderers not to get their kids. Most of the time that is right, but there are rare instances where fathers should get custody. Fathers in Texas have no hope."



Events during Abduction - David left the city after giving the matter about a day's thought. He told no one that he was leaving, but notified friends in a city about 6 hours away to expect him. He drove there with Renee and stayed about a month. He had some money on hand, and he got access through former inlaws to the house of an elderly woman that was sitting empty in Tennessee. He drove his own car, used his own name, but tried not to leave a trail and didn't tell anyone where he was going. He had dealt in antiques before, and he was authorized to sell things from the house, whose owner was too ill to ever return to it. He also played in a band and worked as a DJ, using his own social security number. He got some help taking care of his daughter from connections in the small town. Someone offered to help him disappear into the underground, but he didn't want to do that- his family would have been too worried. As it was, he called his mother periodically, but she didn't know where he was. "Part of me was miserable. It is wrong to take a child from a parent, but Renee was an object to her mother, not a person. I loved Renee so much I couldn't bear the thought of losing her in a divorce."

They stayed in Tennessee about 4 months before the recovery. Renee was very young and didn't ask about her mother, so David didn't explain anything to her being aware that children are too young to understand things. The American Association for Lost Children was involved in the recovery. The founder helped his ex-wife, who had filed for divorce and gotten a custody order in his absence. They traced him to Nashville and got to people who knew

where he was. He thinks he was sold out. First the American Association investigator came to the door, asked about an address of someone else. Then State police came to get him- 5 officers, with guns. He was handcuffed, Renee was asleep. They put her in another car and took him to jail. He told a neighbor to call his mother. He spent night in jail held on \$100,000 bond. He was released the next day and returned to his home state. Their daughter was released to her mother. David was free on personal bond and when brought before the grand jury was not indicted. He was charged with \$4,500 in child support arrears.

After the hearings, David left the state for about 3 years to work elsewhere. First, he borrowed money to pay the back child support and avoid arrest, then he worked to pay off the loan. "I felt really bad. I never meant to hurt my wife or daughter, but my actions have put Renee just where I didn't want her, with her mother and a series of boyfriends."

Current Relationship with Child and Searching Parent - David's daughter is now 6. He has court-ordered visitation for 12 hours every other Saturday (no overnights). She is a restrained and frightened child now. She hears bad things about him at home, and it takes a couple of hours for her to get used to him again at each visit. Her mother has recently remarried and has custody of both of her daughters. David has remarried, has a second daughter, and is again divorced. He is on good terms with his third ex-wife and sees his three year old daughter daily. It is an obvious cause of

regret to David that his flight with his daughter has led to his having so little contact.

Case #5

Background - Lois is 33 years old, white, with 14 years of formal education. She has worked for fast food companies as a manager and in customer relations. Lois was raised as a Baptist and is now Lutheran. She has one daughter, age 7, who was 3 at the time of the abduction. They went into hiding while still living together because Lois was being battered. Although there was only a short period, about 2 weeks, when Lois was missing with her daughter and the father did not have access, she still prevents him from knowing her whereabouts. Lois retains custody of her daughter, Tracy, whose father has regular visitation, which is arranged through Tracy's school.

Significant Childhood History - Lois's major childhood memory of her mother is lying on the floor being kicked by her. When she was 6, her father began another relationship, and her mother left the family, leaving the children behind. The children were brought up by an alcoholic father and very strict stepmother in a family that included Lois, 5 siblings, 1 step siblings, and 2 half brothers and sisters born to her father and stepmother, 9 children in all.

Until the breakup of her original family, her mother had stayed at home with the children while her father worked as a nurse

and was frequently away from the family. Later, her stepmother also had a hospital job. Lois reports no criminality in her family, but there were many other problems. In addition to her father's alcoholism, she witnessed domestic violence between her father and step-mother, at whom he once threw a knife. Lois remembers her mother and stepmother as the more abusive parents, and she recalls seeing the movie Cinderella as a child with some of her siblings and deciding among themselves that "Cinderella had it easy." Despite the problems at home, Lois was a good student, earning honors in high school and later studying computers in college, although she did not graduate. She left to join the military at age 18, and wishes she could have found a way to leave the family sooner.

Significant Marital History - Lois and Jimmy met when they served together in the military. He was her second serious relationship at age 19, and the first guy who was nice to her, did not try to "hit on her" immediately. Still, he had to ask her out many times before she went out with him. She was reluctant to date someone from work, and she was intent on pursuing her own career goals. They dated for 8 months, then lived together 3 years before marrying.

Jimmy worked for UPS for several years while she went to college and then into management for a fast food chain. She was very good at her work and could make several thousand dollars in a week. In addition to working, Lois ran the household. They

disagreed about things like lying to creditors, which she would not tolerate. In her perception, her husband "verged toward the gray areas" of ethics whenever possible.

There were no problems with substance abuse, but other things began to go wrong. She tried to repress her negative feelings, but he pushed her to the point of outbursts. She was the major breadwinner, and Lois thinks her husband may have felt threatened by this. There was no marital infidelity.

Jimmy knew little about the responsibilities of parenthood, being a youngest child, but they were established financially, and they decided to get pregnant. Jimmy's emotional abuse turned to physical abuse about two years after their daughter was born. Lois also lost another child, and he accused her of infidelity without reason. He became very possessive and controlling and wanted her only social contacts to be with his family. He had no friends, and hers from work would only call when they knew he was not at home, because he made them feel unwelcome. He admitted once that he was terrified that she would leave him. He always hit her in places that her clothes would cover.

The first time he choked her to the point that she blacked out, Lois went to see a therapist. After two weeks, the counselor wanted him to come in, also, but he said the problem was hers. She continued in weekly sessions for some time. Although there had never been a lot of passion in the relationship on her side, Lois continued to love her husband. However, when her daughter began to be hurt by him, Lois could not stand to see her own childhood

repeated.

Relationship with Children during Marriage - Jimmy was an uninvolved father, leaving Lois to do most of the parenting although she worked full time, often evenings. If she was gone, he wouldn't even feed their daughter. He also "got carried away with discipline" of their two year old daughter, and he once split her lip. Their primary help with parenting came from his family, and his mother would babysit or help out. So would his brother and sister-in-law, but, since the brother also abused his wife, Lois didn't trust them with her daughter.

Reasons for Abduction - Lois decided she must leave because of repeated abuse. Jimmy choked her in front of their daughter and asked the child "how tight should I squeeze?" Lois avoided him by working different shifts for a couple of days, and she began planning to leave. Her therapist had advised her to do so. While he was at work, she got friends to help her pack, and she left for her parents' home in Maryland. Almost as soon as she left, Jimmy summoned help from law enforcement and missing children's organizations.

Events during and after Abduction - Lois and her daughter were in Maryland only two weeks when she was contacted by sheriff's officers who told her that if she did not return she could face two years in jail and loss of custody. She decided to return, and her

father traveled with her, helping her get an attorney and a restraining order against Jimmy. He also got a restraining order against her and made allegations that she had abused their daughter by pulling her hair and spanking her. In court a week later, he was granted visitation. Although she and their daughter stayed for 5-6 months in a women's shelter and she kept their location secret from him, he did get to see the child for two days a week during this period, which devastated and terrified Lois.

When they went to court about the divorce and child custody, Lois at first felt no one would listen to her concerns about unsupervised visitation. However after the family was referred to the court's domestic abuse project and each was evaluated, visitation was changed to two hours per week, supervised. During this period, Jimmy violated the restraining order, chased her with his car, threatened her in court, and bashed up the car of a friend of hers out of spite. Lois had to watch the routes she drove, and guard all information about where who was staying. She continued to work in the same field, fast food management. Jimmy, however, did not work and spent their savings on search and legal fees to try to force her to come back.

Tracy asked very little about her Dad when her mother took her out of state and later when they stayed at the shelter. Lois believes that this was because he had very little involvement before they left. Tracy was three when they stayed at the shelter, and she was seen there for counseling related to the domestic violence. However, it did not help that her father told Tracy that

her therapist was a witch. Tracy went through a period of aggression toward her mother, and would physically attack Lois. However, these problems lessened with therapy.

Current Relationship with Child and Searching Parent - Lois still maintains as much distance and separateness from Jimmy as possible. He does not know what part of the metropolitan area she lives in, and he does not have her phone number. She carries a beeper, and he can contact her only in that way. She uses a post office box for her mailing address. She reports still being afraid of him. She also fears that Jimmy might try to keep Tracy after a visit. However, his family would oppose this; Lois and Jimmy's mother have a good relationship, and the grandmother has frequent visits (on Lois's time, not her son's).

Lois feels entirely justified in leaving her abusive husband and taking her daughter. She doesn't identify with the label "abduction" at all, although she realizes that is what she was accused of. Asked what could have prevented the abduction, she said that if Jimmy had been willing to seek help, she never would have left. In the same situation again, she would report more of the abuse episodes to the police, seek help from a women's shelter and start legal action sooner.

Case #6

Background - Anna is a 31 year old woman who completed 14 years of



formal education. She was raised as a Mormon but is now unaffiliated. When she abducted her only child, a boy, she was on welfare. Custody was shared at the time and she went into hiding for four months because she wanted primary custody, thought the courts would not give it to her, and was concerned about her ex-husband's home environment. After the abduction, the boy's father gained custody of the boy and Anna now has extended visits.

Significant Childhood History - Anna was one of four children, the second eldest. Her father spent his career in the army and was frequently away from the family. When Anna was 12, her mother went to work in a restaurant, and her parents separated at about the same time. She lived for the next three years with her mother, then spent a year with her father, then returned to her mother. No abductions were involved and there was no criminality in the family. However, there were other significant family problems. Both of her parents abused alcohol, and domestic violence between her parents often ended in her mother being hurt. Her mother, in turn, was physically abusive to the children, sometimes laying all 4 across the bed and whipping them with a belt. Her older brother also beat up the younger children, without being restrained by the parents.

In school, Anna was an average student, and she later took some community college courses in speech, debate, and religion. Neither of her parents practiced any religion, and there was no

particularly strong emphasis on right and wrong when Anna was growing up. Asked how she has coped with problems, Anna said "I usually leave," i.e. change jobs, move, end relationships.

Significant Marital History - Anna and her son's father, Ed, met when they were young adults. He was in school and she worked for a law firm. They dated about 6 months, and she moved in with him because she was lonely. They lived together for 3 years and planned to marry, but never did. It was a troubled relationship, and, although they liked each other, Anna says he was never the "love of my life." They fought constantly, and he called Anna names and said hurtful things. Both yelled and threw things at each other and become involved in other sexual relationships. Both used a drug called crystal, and at one point were arrested and convicted on drug charges. His was a felony conviction and probated sentence; hers a misdemeanor charge and community service sentence. She quit using when she got pregnant. It was an unplanned pregnancy, but her lover was pleased and excited. However, he would not quit dealing and using drugs. They sought counseling for drug-related and relationship problems, and, although he soon quit going, Anna continued for a long time.

Their relationship really broke up over drugs. She wanted none around the baby, and she disliked his "lowlife bum" friends. He refused to change.

Relationship with Child during marriage - Ed was on a week-long

binge when Anna came home from the hospital with their son. Anna reports that Ed came to love their son, Glen, although he never really learned to set limits with him. Anna herself had never really wanted children because she thought she did not like them. Her son changed that, and being a parent became very important.

Reasons for Abduction - Anna moved out of the home, taking Glen, who was less than two, because she thought the drugs being stored, sold, and used there were a danger to him. Also, Ed had another girlfriend. They received counseling through the court system, but Ed stole her purse and beat her up outside the court. Charges against him kept getting dropped, and "the court wouldn't hold anything against him." There was no custody order and no child support. However, with her consent, Ed had visits with Glen every weekend. Once, Ed took him to Vermont for several weeks. Anna believes that if the courts had responded appropriately, she would never have had to leave the state with Glen. But she was unable to obtain primary custody or get his visitation limited or supervised because he had connections and more money, and the courts leaned over backward for him. They gave her the impression that they were following a new trend to give fathers equal consideration in custody cases.

Events during and after Abduction - When Anna first moved out, she moved into an apartment house that her mother managed, living next door to her. After a few months, she went to her grandmother in

New York, then to Santa Fe, where she met the man she later married. They moved together to the western state where they now live. Her new husband was the one who made it possible for her to stay away from Ed and her home state courts. He had sold a business and raised a lot of cash. Anna did not work, and both she and Glen used her future husband's name. Glen was two and just beginning play school. He asked once about Ed, and she simply said that he lived far away. Ed had never really been a caretaker to Glen, and Glen liked her new husband, so he did not seem to miss his father or have any problems with the separation.

After several months, she was found by the FBI, which had been searching for her. She was out of town with a female friend, when FBI agents came to her house. They found her husband and son, and made her husband reveal her whereabouts. Anna believes she was tracked down from a return address on some mail. She had not been making extensive efforts to hide. She was arrested and, Glen was placed in foster care for the weekend, until Ed got there to take him. He had gotten a custody order in his favor after she left the state. Anna spent 5 days in jail, then her father bailed her out by posting property bonds. She was tried, convicted, and placed on probation. She was also ordered to pay \$13,000 in restitution on a repayment schedule tied to her income.

Current Relationship with the Child and Searching Parent - After the criminal trial, Anna went back into family court seeking custody. However, she did not win. She did get visitation,

supervised at first by the court in the city where Ed and Glen lived, then at her mother's home in the same city, and finally unsupervised visits in her home state, where she and her husband still live. Now Glen is 6, and they have a visitation schedule where he spends summer with her. At first, Ed worried about another abduction, but now Anna thinks Glen is too old to abduct and that Ed no longer worries.

Case #7

Background - Wendy is a 39-year-old, Italian-American, Catholic woman. She has completed 14 years of formal education, and has done secretarial work since before the abduction. Her two daughters were 4 and 6 at the time of the abduction, and are now 12 and 14. This was a custodial abduction, with Wendy leaving because she did not want her ex-husband, who had emotional problems, to have contact with her daughters. She was on the run for two months. The ex-husband now has no contact with the children.

Significant Childhood History - Wendy was raised in a small town in Connecticut where her father was a fireman and her mother stayed home with the two children, Wendy and her older brother. There were no family separations. She reports that there were no problems with domestic violence, child abuse, or substance abuse; "it was a Donna Reed type of home." The family was a close one when she was growing up, and they still are. Wendy was a fairly

good student who earned B's. She carried a 4.0 grade point in college. The family was religious, without being particularly pious or devout. Wendy reports strong but not rigid emphasis on right and wrong, which was communicated by example and emphasis on self respect and the golden rule.

Significant marital history - Wendy and her husband met in Texas, where she had moved with a couple of women friends to work. They dated for about 3 months, lived together for 8 months, then got married at age 23. He was more eager for the marriage than she. She would have preferred to wait, but she does report loving him at that time. Pregnancy was not involved in the decision.

When they were first married, both worked, he in construction, she in an office. They moved to Connecticut where he attended an engineering program. Wendy reports that their two daughters were planned and wanted children. There were no sexual problems or marital infidelity in the relationship with her husband. Although there was never any real violence, she was afraid of him on a couple of occasions when he raised his fist to her. However, she knew her family would help her if necessary, and that she could cope. After the children were born Wendy stayed home with them, and this, she feels, made her "less of a person" in her husband's eyes. She believes he saw her as a non-contributing party in the family. Substance abuse became the big area of contention between them. Both had used marijuana causally. But when he began to spend lots of money on cocaine, she objected. It was largely an

economic issue at first; she was a "saver," while he was a "spender."

At first she did not realize there were serious marital problems, then later did not want to try to work things out, so she never sought professional help. She began to realize that they had very different ethical standards. He was frequently dishonest, spiteful, and jealous, for example stealing objects from the home of an elderly person in whose home he did repairs and tearing up a neighbor's IRS refund check out of spite. He thought these incidents funny, while she was appalled.

Relationship with Children during the Marriage - Nancy was their first born. Wendy's husband wanted a second child soon, so the two would be close, though he later said he had wanted two so each parent could have one in case of divorce. Wendy and her husband separated during her second pregnancy, then reconciled for a few months, in part because he did not want to lose out on a house they were buying. He refused to come pick up his wife and second daughter, Phoebe, after the birth. He later tried to deny paternity of Phoebe, though Wendy had been involved with no one else.

When others were around, her husband was great with the kids; "his life was about show and appearances." He also helped some when they were alone and liked to read to Nancy. Wendy believes he was about as involved as most fathers but that he saw the children as possessions, and he would put Nancy in difficult, unfair

positions, asking for example, which parent she loved more. He never lived with Wendy and the children after Phoebe's birth.

Cultural and other differences exacerbated the marital disagreements. He had no religious background or upbringing, and Wendy believes he was brought up in amoral or immoral surroundings. His parents had extramarital affairs, cheated people in other ways, and one eventually committed suicide.

Wendy never suspected any abuse of Nancy during the marriage. After they separated, Nancy, age 2, attended a play school two days a week and visited her father regularly. Suddenly she began acting strangely, refused to go to school, and would crawl under the bed screaming. She then told her mother of a "trip" that her Daddy had told her about. Wendy went to his apartment and saw that he had everything packed. She ended the visitation, and they began a court battle. The family was evaluated by the court, and there was worry Nancy have been sexually abused by her father. This was not confirmed, but the evaluator recommended against visitation on the basis of his plan to flee with Nancy. Visitation was halted for a year and a half.

Reasons for Abduction - Wendy had physical custody, and her ex-husband had been out of the family picture. Then he remarried and went back to court, and the court appeared ready to allow visitation without having completed the evaluation process it had ordered. Wendy had been told by an earlier evaluator that her exhusband was a "social psychopath," and she feared he might murder



his children and commit suicide. She could not tolerate resumed visitation.

Events During Abduction - Wendy moved with the children to California, wanting distance between her family and her ex-husband, but not feeling any need to hide at first. She worked in a bank and got credit there to buy a house; the children went to public schools. All three were active in Scouts and church. The children were free to write or call their father, but they did not want to. When the children thought about going through more evaluations, court, and visiting their father, they became tense and unhappy. Wendy believed she was buying time for her children to grow up in peace. They were happy during this time and did well in school.

Then a family member told Wendy that her ex had gotten a custody order in his favor and that she and the children were being sought. She hired an attorney and expressed willingness to return to her home state and to court, but she wanted assurances that the girls would not have to go with their father against their wills. These were not forthcoming, so she hid with the girls for two months and considered her options. She could not have done this without help from family and friends, who even offered to help her flee the country.

Her ex-husband appeared on national media during this time, and the children's pictures appeared on milk cartons. Nancy saw her own picture on a missing children's poster while with her grandmother, and she asked "Nanna, how does a mommy kidnap a child

who's always lived with her?"

How Recovered - Wendy eventually decided that she couldn't go on hiding. She didn't want to try to share custody with her ex-husband from so far away, fearing the outcome would be a split year for the children, and that she would not be close by in case they needed her while they were with their father. She surrendered through her attorney and promised to appear in court. The prosecutor interviewed her and recommended that criminal charges be continued without finding. After a while, the charges were dropped. During this time, her ex was still making TV appearances talking about his search for his missing children. Wendy thinks the notoriety was something he enjoyed.

Wendy didn't know what she did was a federal crime because she had custody and thought she could move if she wished. Faced with the same situation (of forcing her daughters to visit a father they feared) she would absolutely do the same thing again. She would consider going abroad. Asked what impact her actions had on her children, she thinks it showed them that "if they feel they are right, they should have the courage to do what they must. The courts and the law are not always right."

Current Relationships with children and searching parent - After she returned with the girls, she won custody and their father was awarded visitation, limited at first to short supervised sessions, then every other weekend. He and his second wife saw them

alternate weekends for three months, then he filed for custody again. He tried to pressure the girls into saying they wanted to live with him, but they declined, then refused to visit him any more. His custody petition never went to court. By the following year, he had ceased trying to force visitation, and the girls have not seen him since 1985.

Their father remains married to his second wife, and they have two children. He refused to pay child support after his new children came along. Wendy has spoken to him once, last year, about insurance and child support. Nancy wrote him once and got a blaming, "hate mail" type letter back. She wrote once more and never got an answer.

Wendy remains single and lives near family members. She thinks her relationship with her daughters is great. They are active and happy, and they sometimes tease her with "Remember, you kidnapped us! We'll tell people you're a felon!"

Case #8

Background - Judy is a 38 year old woman now living in Central America with her third husband and children from that marriage. She is a college graduate and the mother of 5 children. The eldest two from her earlier marriages were the ones involved in the abduction, girls now 15 and 10. She took them because she thought they should be together and with her when she left the United States and did not think she could win custody in court. They were

on the run for nine months. Their fathers now have custody of these two girls. She also has a boy, 7, girl, 5, and boy, 16 months. At the time of the abduction, she was running her own bakery in the U.S.. Now she is a housewife, with a family income which is adequate for the local economy.

Significant Childhood History - Judy was one of six children who grew up with both their parents in the midwestern U.S. She is the second oldest child in an Irish-American, Catholic family. Her mother was a teacher, her father a sales representative who eventually started his own business. Their lifestyle was upper middle class. Her parents lived together until her father died about 10 years ago in a DWI auto accident. Her father's alcoholism and violence were major problems for her and for the family. He had several DWI arrests but no other legal problems. Her mother also drank, probably to excess, and there were physical fights between them. Her mother was no match for her father's size and strength. Police were called to the house several times. It was not unusual for things at the house to get broken and her mother sometimes needed medical care. There also was physical and emotional abuse of the children, and Judy describes herself as the scapegoat. She recalls frequent belt whippings that left welts.

During her childhood, the family was Catholic and churchgoing. From this, Judy feels she learned hypocrisy, since her parents appeared outwardly to be community models, while their family life was miserable. At home, she recalls no particular emphasis on

ethics or a moral code. Her dad's philosophy was "If you can't buy the American dream, steal it."

In public school, Judy was a very good student and active in girl scouts. She went away to college at 16 and earned a 3.4 GPA.

Significant Marital History - The first of Judy's two previous marriages was the longer term one that is described in the most detail here. They met during college when both worked at a health food type bakery. She liked him for his kindness and loyalty and they became friends. They began living together for six years when she got pregnant at 23. They decided to marry, and were together 10 years before splitting up when their daughter was two. They were active in the peace movement and in other social causes and had similar values, according to Judy. She reports that she had smoked marijuana, beginning at age 13, but that she had stopped by college. Drugs were not a problem in her marriage, and there was no violence or criminal behavior by either of them. Emotionally, they were not well matched, however. He was passive and quiet and withdrew when upset. Ultimately, it was the emotional issues that led to their breakup; there was no feeling left between them.

Parenthood for Judy was something to be experienced, explored, an important part of life to be savored. In her perception, it was not as important to her husband. During their early years as parents, they had strong support from a network of friends, and acceptance and warmth from her husband's mother.

Relationship with Children during Marriage - Judy acknowledges that her husband did most of the child care, while they shared tasks in the evenings when she was home from work. However, she describes parenthood as critically important to her sense of herself, her "first participation in a miracle." Neither she nor her husband ever suspected or accused each other of abuse or inappropriate parenting. Neither was at all religious; they practiced yoga as a form of spirituality.

Judy takes responsibility for precipitating their divorce. She was "looking for something else," and, after meeting an old friend while at an out-of-town conference, she slept with him. Both parties wanted to divorce, which they handled themselves without attorneys. They agreed to joint custody, a 50/50 split on property and expenses, and no child support. They lived 4 blocks apart, which made shared custody easier. They continued to get along; there was little or no acrimony.

Judy started dating someone who had been a close friend to both of them. He had been rooming in their house, though there had been no sexual relationship between them until after the divorce. They weren't even in love, but he was there, and the relationship was primarily a physical one from her perspective. They lived together from the beginning and married soon after. When Judy became pregnant, her second husband "wasn't excited," and that helped end a relationship that never really worked. They divorced when their daughter was two and her older daughter five.

Reasons for Abduction - Later Judy met her present husband while he was studying in the U.S. They married and lived together in the U.S. for five years, and their oldest child was born here. It was during this period that custody problems emerged with both her ex-husbands. She wanted to move to her husband's Central American home, and they tried to work out custody arrangements through a court mediation program. It was fine with her that the girls visit their fathers in the US, but she wanted them to coordinate times so that the girls, then about 9 and 6, could travel together and not be completely separated during their visits (their fathers lived in the same town and were still friendly). However, negotiations broke down and reached an impasse. Judy thought she could get away with just taking the girls and leaving, so she began to plan the abduction. She felt that she finally had a good marriage, a strong extended family, and she wanted all of her children to grow up together in a family. One of her ex-husbands was single at the time, and the other had married and divorced. Neither had children. Siblings had been very important to Judy growing up, and she didn't want her daughters to be isolated only children.

Events during Abduction - She and her husband had planned a visit to another city, then a vacation at his family's home, with the girls. They sold their house quickly, leaving lots of things behind. When they reached their destination abroad, they stayed first with his family, then got their own place nearby. The transition was hard on her two daughters, who did not speak Spanish

when they arrived there. They were enrolled in private schools, and Judy believes they would have settled in and made a good adjustment if they had been given the opportunity. She feels her family environment was much better for raising children there than in her ex-husbands' childless homes.

She had the girls with her for 9 months, during which time their fathers were welcome to visit, and did on at least one occasion before the reabduction of the children to the US. Both her family and her husband's helped them a great deal, financially and emotionally. Their location was never a secret, and the girls were not hidden or lied to. She told them she wanted them to have a normal family life with her.

How Recovered - The fathers of the two girls teamed up and came unannounced to the city where Judy and her family lived. Each spent about \$8,000 on this resnatching of the two girls. The father of the older girl contacted her and made arrangements to meet them both at a bus stop. The girls, still having trouble adjusting to the cultural differences, went willingly. They were 11 and 7.

For four days, Judy and her family did not know what had happened to the girls, and they were frantic. They called former inlaws in the states but no one would admit what had happened. Finally, they learned that the girls were safe with their fathers.

Back in the US, the two fathers filed legal actions - for sole custody, civil suits, and criminal proceedings. One ex-husband was



a social worker and had good legal and court contacts. She lost all visitation with the girls, was ordered to pay restitution of the search expenses of \$16,000, and there was an outstanding criminal warrant against her that for a time kept her from reentering the U.S. Two years ago, she went back to the States to try to clear up the legal situation and win some visitation rights. She was arrested, finger printed, and taken to jail. She felt like the victim of a witch hunt. She was pregnant at the time and terrified that she would lose her baby to child welfare if she went to jail.

Current Relationship with Children and Searching Parent -  
Eventually, the criminal charges ended with probation, and she was still required to make restitution. She is heavily in default on this, due to the low value of their money in U.S. dollars and the difficulty taking any money out of the country. She is now legally free to travel in the US, which is important to her because her mother is getting older, and she might have to go home in an emergency.

Judy continues to have a good relationship with her first husband's mother, and when her oldest daughter visits that grandmother in the summers, Judy is welcome to travel there to see her daughter. They have had two extended visits, staying together with the grandmother, and she hopes to have another visit this summer. She has had no personal contact with her younger daughter since the court fight two years ago, and this pains her greatly.

Judy and her oldest daughter have talked some about the custody fight and abduction. She thinks her daughter feels some ambivalence and guilt about participating in her own reabduction. She believes she has a good marriage and is happy living in Central America, where she stays home to care for her younger children. One of her ex-husbands has remarried but has no other children, and the other is single. It is clear that Judy has adopted her husband's family and culture. They have frequent contact with many extended kin, she believes in the political struggle going on in her adopted country, and she now speaks English with a slight Latino inflection.

#### Case #9

Background - Rose is a 39 year old white woman with a few years of college who, at the time of the abduction, was a housewife and part-time school custodian. She was raised as a Baptist and identifies strongly with fundamentalist Christianity. Her three children, a boy, 12, girl, 10, and girl, 8, were involved in the abduction which occurred because she wanted a marital separation and wanted to spare the children from being caught in an acrimonious dispute. In hiding for two years, she eventually reconciled with their father and all five are living together again.

Significant Childhood History - Rose was one of two children in a

two-parent family. Her father was a mechanic and her mother stayed home while she was young, then worked for a few years outside of the home. She reports no history of criminality, substance abuse, family separations, or family violence. She describes her parents as strict but loving, and she remembers a few spankings that were taken seriously because they were infrequent. The family was quite religious, attending church weekly and reading the Bible as a family. Both her parents are Baptist, and they believed in living by the Bible. There was a lot of emphasis on moral standards and on telling the truth. She still remembers looking her dad in the eye and fibbing once, and although he accepted her statement, she could see he did not believe her, and she felt awful. The family was a close and supportive one.

In school, Rose thinks of herself as an underachiever, someone who slid by passing when she could have done better. She taught Sunday school for younger children. She later attended a Christian university.

Significant Marital History - Rose had dated several young men, two fairly seriously, before meeting her husband. They met through a friend and had a whirlwind romance and thus did not know each other well before marriage. She worked as a nurse for the first 3 years they were married, until their first child was born. He did factory work and worked at a store on weekends. There was no substance abuse, criminality, violence, or infidelity in the relationship, but they did not communicate well and he had

difficulty with closeness and intimacy. After a year of marriage, she was ready to leave him, but her beliefs and upbringing did not allow her to consider divorce. They discussed separating, but he talked her in to staying, and she now wishes she had left before they had children.

Despite the weak marital relationship, she wanted children. Her husband said he was not ready for them, but after two years of her being responsible for birth control she told him that it was his turn to be responsible if he wished. He did nothing and she became pregnant. When she first gave birth, her husband expected them to spend a great deal of time with his family, and, instead of helping her himself with the children, he wanted her to accept help from his mother.

Despite similar religious beliefs, some of the conflicts she and her husband had were over ethical issues. She described how he thought he could tell "white lies" and still be "within the law." He thought it was OK to buy a radar detector and speed, but he was judgmental about other's ethics. Finally, her husband accused her of being capable of almost any morally wrong behavior and she felt cruelly wronged.

Relationship with Children During Marriage - Rose reports that she did 99% of the child care. Her husband worked and paid the bills, and, when he did do something with the children, he showed poor judgement, like letting them ride, standing, in the back of the pick-up. If he was involved in some activity, Rose felt she had to

watch her children twice as closely, "guarding them all the time." Asked about the importance of parenting in her own life, Rose said she had always been in conflict about whom to put first, noting that the kids, not her husband, had always come first with her.

Reasons for Abduction - Rose and her husband were married and living together up until the time she left with the children. There had been no court involvement. She did not want a divorce, or even a permanent separation, but she hoped for changes in their relationship. She did not think he cared for her or their children. She did not want to live close to her in laws any longer, and she would have preferred that her husband not work for the family business. Finally, he made accusations that showed he had no faith in her, saying "The way you believe, you could do anything and justify it." Rose could provide no details about his suspicions, saying that even at the time she didn't understand them. She decided to leave and didn't want him to talk her out of it. If she had moved out and stayed close by, she was sure her children would be caught in the middle of their parents' conflicts. She felt it much better that the children be with her.

Events During Abduction - Rose left with the children without leaving any address, although she left a taped message that he could contact her through her parents. Her husband was at a training program for four days, so she got a cash advance on MasterCard, packed the bare necessities, told the kids they were

going away with her, and drove off in a van belonging to her parents. She took the children for a vacation in the Sacramento area, then rented a house near her parents. They knew where she was and helped her. Without them and family friends, she could not have succeeded in leaving and hiding. Her husband sometimes wrote her care of her parents and she got the letters. He promised support at first, but his father talked him out of it and she received nothing. The children never asked for their father, although the oldest cried once for toys they left at home.

Rose stayed at home with the children, living cheaply in a small town, doing odd jobs to earn a little money, and gardening to help feed the family. They did not get AFDC or Foodstamps, but individuals did help them. They were not in need, and she remembers it as a very good time. As the children reached school age, she home schooled them. This was a choice she and her husband had favored and planned, not an attempt to hide the children or a decision based primarily on religious values. They made friends in the neighborhood and through church and other activities. Rose had no problem obtaining medical or dental care for the children.

For two years her husband had no personal contact with the family. He found her once by following her parents. He wanted to talk and tried to give her money, but she refused, seeing it as an attempt to buy his way back into the family. Being found was bad because they then had to move. During the separation, her husband had women friends and she had men friends who were platonic.

Asked what could have prevented the abduction, Rose said that

a caring attitude by her husband toward his family would have kept her from leaving. She still thinks leaving was the right thing to do. She knows now that it would have been smarter to have gone to court to get custody, but she thinks that spending time with separated parents would have been too confusing and hard on the children, who were all still preschoolers.

How Recovered - Ultimately, her husband got a separation and custody order, hired a private investigator, found her again by following her parents, and involved the local police. He apparently told the police she was involved with an extremist group. A SWAT team of 22 officers with rifles surrounded the house at breakfast one morning. They knocked, ordered her out of the house, held her at gun point and handcuffed her in front of the children, who were hysterical. She was taken to the police station and questioned about other extremist group connections, while the children were taken to the fire station to wait for their father, who was 2 hours away by car.

Rose spent 7 days in jail. Finally, charges were reduced to custodial interference, bail was reduced, and she got out on bond. Her husband took the children back to the small town where he still lived. She got a job and thought about going back to school. She didn't see the children for 3 months. Her first visit was for 2 hours on one of the children's birthdays. She got court ordered visitation, to be supervised by her in laws, every two weeks. Later, she was allowed unsupervised visits. Finally, she could

have the children overnight. Her husband wanted her to return to him, and contacted her attorney about this. She refused at first, not wanting to be close to his family and thinking he should not work with them. Finally, they worked out an agreement to move to a nearby town and he now commutes to work in the family business.

Current Relationships - Rose and her husband continue to disagree about her actions in taking the children. She has never considered it an abduction (because they were married and she shared custody). He demanded when they reconciled that she admit what she did was wrong, but she never did. While she doesn't think it is right to keep children away from their fathers, she could not trust her husband not to involve the children in parental issues and unpleasantness. Her children are now very loyal to her and defend the action she took. They remember the time away as a good one.

Since the reconciliation, the marriage has become a better one. Her husband tries harder, communicates better, and includes her more. He's still not a very involved father, but they are both relatively happy. The children, now 12, 10, and 8, are doing well. Rose wouldn't feel the need to abduct now that her children are older, but if she were doing it over, she would have filed for separation and custody and done things legally.

Case #10

Background - Peter is a 44 year old white male who was a



househusband when the marriage ended and his wife left with the children (girl 6 and boy 4). He could not get custody which, because of the role reversals he thought he deserved and went on the run with the children for a year. During that time he stayed on a commune and joined a Born-again Christian church. Through pressure from church members and the belief that he was about to be caught, he turned himself in.

Significant childhood history - Peter was raised in a two parent family, the oldest of four children, with a father who worked in the navy and a mother who was a housewife. There were no significant losses in his family. He was dyslexic in grammar school but overcame it and graduated fourth in his class and received a football scholarship to college. He described his family as religious, going to church as much as twice a week, though neither of his parents held an office in the church. The children were raised with a strong sense of right and wrong.

Significant marital history - A few years after he graduated college, Peter married his wife after a 16 month courtship. He had dated a little prior to that. Both were working as police officers, jobs they kept for about two years. They both found the job too stressful and moved out of California to New Mexico to try homesteading and living off the land. Six years later their first child was born, a daughter, and his wife became less enamored with

their lifestyle. She went to work as a probation officer. His parents lived nearby and helped out with the children when he had a part-time job.

Relationship with children during marriage - With the birth of their second child, a son, he took over all of the housechores and became a househusband while she supported them financially. He also began building a house for them. Within this complete role reversal, she became increasingly unhappy with the homesteading notion of life and finally left with both children. There was only one incident of violence - during one heated argument she threatened to kill him and reached for his revolver at which point he punched her. She mentioned that incident as one reason why she wanted to leave the marriage. The children, because of his being a househusband, became very important to him and he describes them as being inseparable.

Reasons for abduction - With her departure (he says it was because of unhappiness with their lifestyle and her wanting to marry someone with money) a series of court battles ensued. In 1987, even though he had many witnesses in his favor, she won custody and he was given visitation and the onus of child support payments. "This was traumatic for the children and they were clinging to me...It was a farce. As she was part of the system, she knew judges all over the state. We had totally reversed roles and I was

supposed to pay support though she made all the money." For the next few months he was visiting once a week but the children were pestering Peter to stay with him all the time. "They began asking me to take them and leave, especially my daughter. I began looking for a new age community where we could go. I found a guy who was going to start a farm and he met me and the kids, knew what the situation was, and said let's go. We had our chance to get a headstart when my ex was going on her honeymoon and asked me to take the children for two weeks. My daughter and I were co-equals in planning the disappearance." Peter had threatened to kidnap them a few months before in an attempt to get more visitation. She had promised to give him split custody but had never made good on the promise. It was the "mockery of justice" that was done by the courts (the inequity of visitation) and the fact that she was "poisoning" their son with anti-biotics. As a health food advocate, he considered that abuse. Once his son was removed from the medication when they were on the run, all his illnesses cleared up.

Events during abduction - "When we left I didn't tell my parents where I was going though they knew I was probably going to leave. I was having people send letters from all over the world that I had mailed them saying everything was fine. I wanted her to think we were traveling all around. I knew the phones were tapped so I couldn't call. We worked on the commune and I got room and board. I was a handyman. My only activity was with the church and people

would pick me up and drive me to seminars. I homeschooled my daughter and the children were asked to pick new names and I picked a new last name."

Peter said the children never asked to see their mother during the time they were gone. The family joined a local church which was a division of the Seventh Day Adventists. Most of the church members knew he was in hiding and for six months helped Peter with his cover. Then the pastor began suggesting to Peter he get the issue resolved. The other members and the elders also starting trying to persuade him to get a reconciliation of some kind.

Because Peter said he found religion, he eventually began to prepare the children for returning, though at one point he thought about leaving and going on the run again. He had credit cards and believes he could have made a successful relocation again but his relationship with the church members was having an effect on him.

Meanwhile his ex-wife had contacted the police, the FBI, and sent out posters about the children, one of which fell into the hands of the church members and this increased the pressure on him. There was even an FBI visit to his high school reunion, which he avoided suspecting a trap.

How recovered - Peter finally turned himself in, first by contacting his wife and sending his daughter back as a peace offering. She did not keep her end of the bargain and a SWAT team was sent to get the son. Peter was handcuffed, which the child saw and was very upset about. As a result of the abduction, Peter

spent three months in jail and had to pay \$5000 over time as restitution. He served the time as a plea bargain and settled out of court for punitive damages.

Would he do it again? "I sure would do it over. I wouldn't do it now but I think it was the only thing a reasonable person would have done! Men do not get a fair shake in courts."

Current relationship with children and searching parent

"According to the courts, there is no visitation but with the permission of my ex I see them every three weeks and holidays. I call at least once a week and write an occasional letter. They have moved three and a half hours away and I'll drive the whole distance to pick them up for the weekend and then she'll meet me half way on return. She has offered to drive them all the way over here but then I won't see them as long. She is interested in maintaining some contact with me for the best interests of the children. Her new husband is not too bad... The kids and I talk nostalgically about the good times we had during the abduction and we are still pretty close with some of the people from the church."

Case #11

Background - Stan is a 33 year old white Baptist construction worker who abducted his two sons, 5 and 3, to Canada because they were being continuously neglected by their mother and abused by a number of her boyfriends. Attempts to get assistance from Child

Protective Services were to no avail as were attempts to gain custody. The abduction lasted 18 months, ending when he was caught applying for a Canadian driver's license with improper identification. Stan now has custody of the children following continued maltreatment by the mother, actions which he believes exonerate his earlier behavior.

Significant childhood history - Stan was the oldest of two children, reared in a working class family where one or both of his parents were always employed in factory work. In looking back on his upbringing, he believes he may have been slightly physically abused by his father who had an explosive temper. He occasionally witnessed mild violence between his parents when they would shout and throw things at each other. The family were baptists and described as religious, attending church twice a week where his father sometimes served as an usher. Following rules was important in the family. School performance was described as average, with Stan being stronger in shop-related courses.

Significant marital history - After a short courtship, he and his future wife moved in together. She became pregnant six months later and he decided the honorable thing to do was to marry her. He was not optimistic about the relationship as she had three previous divorces (he was 21 and she was 23). He believes he would not have married her had she not gotten pregnant. There was no history of substance abuse or domestic violence during the

courtship. She was working part-time and was receiving training money as part of a Vocational Technical grant. He was unemployed. They were receiving help from his family but not from hers.

They were initially happy after they were married. Their second child, conceived two years later, was planned. One physical fight was reported by Stan following a verbal fight. He had wanted to take a shower after coming home from work and she had wanted to talk about something immediately. He moved her out of the way, she kned him in the groin, and he began to choke her before stopping. He admits to no other physical fights though says that she accused him of a number of other things. They were living a fairly isolated life at the time in a rural area of a mid-Western state.

After their second child was born, his wife became very depressed and disinterested in child care. He attributed the reaction to post-partum depression. At that time their roles were traditional - she was home and he was working.

Her request for a separation was a surprise to him. He came home from work early one day and found her family helping her clean out the house. He called the police for help in stopping her from taking the community property and was told there was no divorce action and it was out of their control. He called back again and said that unless they came they would have to send an ambulance. Eventually the police came and recommended that, because she had no money, she go with the children to a women's shelter, which she did.

She left and Stan did not know where they were living for six

months, though he was allowed visitation after six weeks. Stan said he came close to killing himself during that time as he was so distraught at not seeing his children. She filed divorce papers, moved into a trailer with another man, and placed a restraining order on him. This was the beginning of a long chain of false accusations against him. There was a brief marital reconciliation while they tried to patch things up. During that time he took the children to another state for a few days for a visit and she, believing it was an abduction (which he denies), had them brought back by the police and the divorce proceedings continued.

Relationship with children during marriage - He would help out at bedtime and with play, describing himself as a typical father. She was described as very good with the first child but ignoring the second.

Reasons for abduction - As the custody battle and divorce proceedings continued, Stan became aware that the children were being neglected by her and physically abused by a variety of men with whom she was living. Enough complaints were filed against her that the children were made wards of the state while their disposition was being settled with her being granted temporary custody. He had warned her that if things did not change for the boys he was going to act but his threats were ignored. When Stan's pleas to Child Protective Services went unheeded (he was getting anonymous phone calls from people that the children were being



abused), he decided to act. He sold off his possessions, rented an apartment in Canada, and, during visitation, left with them. The boys were five and three at the time.

Events during abduction - His parents were notified that he was going to leave and he called them occasionally for short periods of time to give them an update as to his well-being. He also asked his parents to keep his ex-wife informed that the children were okay. Stan was able to find some part-time work and takes pride in saying he never took a full-time job away from a Canadian.

He had false IDs for the children with fabricated birth certificates. They changed their last but not their first names. People were told that the mother had died. Stan emphasizes that the oldest boy knew that their mother was still alive and that he never "conned" his son into believing otherwise but that the boy went along with the story to stay with his father. The three year old was too young to be told much. The five year old was enrolled in school while the three year old stayed home with him. The children were not instructed in any way to avoid the police or to avoid calling attention to themselves. The boys were in good health the whole time they were with him.

How recovered - When Stan applied for a driver's license he was caught. "I had not done my homework to know what numbers needed to be in what order on the application and I was using a fake ID. The RCMP were notified and, after being under surveillance for a few

days, he was nabbed after walking his son to school. A SWAT team arrested him because his ex-wife had reported him to be armed and dangerous.

After capture and return to the US, the boys were turned over to their mother and Stan spent six months in jail awaiting trial. Bond was set too high for him to be released. The boys missed him terribly and had a hard time adjusting to being away from him. "It was very hard on them," Stan said.

At the trial he was found not guilty and allowed supervised visitation first for two hours and then, after six months, unsupervised visitation overnight. He continued to fight for custody and, because all the accusations against him had been proven false, he continued to gain ground. He tried to prove she was an unfit mother (she has since married and divorced twice more). His living situation with a live-in stable partner proved to the courts to be more suitable than hers. In 1989, following further evaluation of the boys who were having extreme difficulties (at one point during a visit with the guardian ad litem they defecated on the bathroom floor in the office and threw toilet paper over the room), he finally won custody.

#### Current relationship with children and searching parent

- The children, now 10 and eight, are living with him and doing well. School performance has improved markedly. They visit their mother on every other weekend and she is paying child support of \$150 a month. According to Stan, the children ask for him when

they are with her.

Would he do it again? Stan said, "It was done out of concern for the children. Probably under the same circumstances, yes. But it was hard while I was in Canada. I was always looking over my shoulder and it was hard being in jail for six months. It was especially hard for the children who were taken from me and given back to her. But when it comes to the safety of my children, I would do it again."

#### Case #12

Background - Florence is a 39 year old white secretary with a 12th grade education who abducted her children because she thought she would never gain custody and the court system in New Jersey was stacked against her due to her husband's (Nelson) family contacts. She, her new boyfriend (later her husband), and the children hid for four years, first in a Central American country and later in New Mexico. She was located when she was recognized by an old acquaintance at a convention where she was working as a hostess.

Significant childhood history - Florence was raised by her mother and step-father. She had little contact with her biological father until she was in her 20s. She was sexually abused by a neighbor

one time when she was 10. It was also at that age that her best friend died. She described herself as not being a good student in high school. She had a very religious upbringing, describing her parents as "borderline proselytizers like Billy Graham." She broke with the family religiously when she was 14.

Significant marital history - Florence met Nelson through friends and that they lived communally for awhile, "like children of the 60s." They married in 1974. According to Florence they fought a lot verbally and used marijuana daily. She worked as a secretary and he as a clerk. Problems emerged after their first child, a daughter was born, when Nelson felt he was not getting enough attention from her and they began to have different thoughts about their alternative lifestyle with her wanting to move towards a more traditional life. About the time the second child was born (a son), he lost his job. His parents were very involved with the family at the time and helped them out financially but Florence was becoming increasingly unhappy.

Relationship with children during marriage - Both parents were spending time with the children when they were young and Nelson's mother was also very involved. Florence believes that after the breakup Nelson only wanted custody to please his mother.

Reasons for abduction - After the birth of their son, Florence left the marriage several times but always returned. Nelson did not

want her to go and would make threats that she would not have custody if she ever left. Finally she left with the children for Texas (there is some indication that another man was involved.) Three weeks later, Nelson went to Texas and brought the children back to New Jersey with the expectation on her part that she would have split custody. It turned out that even though she knew where they were, she was not allowed to see them. She moved to New Jersey and, with legal assistance, gained visitation every other weekend. She was unhappy with that and tried to get the case moved to Texas. She said that future attempts to gain custody were blocked in New Jersey in part, she believes, because Nelson's father was doing business with the judge. The next time she had visitation, she left with the children and her future husband for Central America. She did not believe the children were being harmed by Nelson but also did not see him as being interested in them.

Events during abduction - Florence had told her parents and friends she was leaving but did not tell them where they were going. She did not have a passport for the children but did have false IDs for herself and the children. She chose their location because there was not any coup occurring at the time and she had heard the school system was good and the American dollar strong. She arranged to meet her future husband there. They did not have jobs when they arrived but had saved a sufficient amount of money to survive. Her daughter (age 6) was ecstatic to be with them but her son (age 4)

was confused. The children picked new names for themselves which, when coupled with learning a new language, was not difficult to adjust to. "My daughter became fluent in Spanish but my son balked. After one year there, I knew we had to return to the States because the schools weren't good enough to keep the kids competitive and they wouldn't feel comfortable in their own culture."

Florence's new husband flew ahead to Florida and arranged a house for them. After some difficulties with customs as they had overstayed their allotted visa time, Florence and the children joined him. Enrolling them in school (now 7 & 5) was a problem as they had no papers so they went to a private school. The next three years were normal and happy years. Their health was good and no extraordinary attempts were made to stay hidden except that the children were told to not say that their father was looking for them. Florence would occasionally call her parents who were being watched by the FBI. She applied for a new social security number which she received under a new name.

The children would ask occasionally about their father and were told that they would see him in the future. They did not grow up with the idea they were in hiding, according to Florence. The daughter was told if she wanted to go visit Nelson she would have to stay with him. The daughter was asked if she wanted to do that and the daughter said no. Florence candidly admitted that if her daughter had wanted to see him, she would not have permitted it.

How recovered - Florence was working at a convention center when a visitor from New Jersey recognized her and said her name, which she denied. "He walked away but when I got home I found out people were asking questions about me. The police had contacted my boss. We talked and decided that going on the run again was not a good idea because the kids were doing well in school. We decided instead to get a lawyer. The FBI came the next day and handcuffed me and pulled the kids out of school. My ex flew down and took them back home." Florence went to jail for a week and then was released on bail. She was unable to speak with the children for several months and eventually moved back to New Jersey to be closer to them. Eight months later, supervised visitation began, and 18 months later unsupervised visitation was allowed.

Current relationship with children and searching parent - The children were described as having a lot of acting out problems, with the son in particular not growing physically. The daughter was described as "super mature" while the son was less mature than would be expected for his age. Florence moved one block away from her children and Nelson (which infuriated him) and eventually gained joint legal custody of her daughter (who wanted it) but not of her son. The daughter (now 17) spends most of the time with Florence and Florence sees her son every other weekend. Her new husband gets along well with her daughter but not with her son, in part Florence believes, because Nelson blames her new husband for the abduction.

Would she do it again? "No! I am glad I did it because of the time we had together without being pulled apart but I would not do it again knowing what I know now. I feel guilty because when I left, even though they weren't close to their father four years later their leaving me was very traumatic for them."

Case #13

Background - Carmen, a Puerto Rican Catholic by birth whose family moved to the U.S. when she was 6, abducted her four year old daughter to Puerto Rico following a Child Protective Services investigation into sexual abuse of the daughter who was diagnosed with venereal disease. Carmen, 21 at the time and with a 10th grade education, was separated from the child's father (Tom) and living with the father of her soon to be born second child. While Carmen did not believe that the child's father was the abuser, if she exonerated him from all charges, the investigation would have shifted to her and she worried she would have lost custody of both her children (her oldest was about to be made a ward of the state). The abduction lasted for two months.

Significant childhood history - Carmen, raised by both parents, was the third oldest of 11 children. When she was six her family moved



to New York from Puerto Rico because opportunities were greater in the U.S. The family was religious and close-knit and followed the church's teachings in terms of right and wrong. There is no history of substance abuse or domestic violence. Carmen was an average student.

Significant marital history - Carmen met her daughter's father (Tom) when she was 15 and became pregnant shortly thereafter, giving birth at 16. The couple moved in together, in part as an escape from her father who was angry at her for getting pregnant. The couple never married though they acquired a marriage license at one point. The relationship was problematic, "When my daughter was one we were fighting a lot and I was not used to fighting because I was religious. I did not want to go to the clubs and he did and he became a little violent. I moved back in with my parents and then with friends and then on my own." Tom supported her during this period with \$30 a week child support and they maintained an on-again off-again relationship. When Florence was 19 she met the father of her second child. Her dating someone new was a shock to Tom. In turn, Florence had seen Tom with another woman. With the relationship finally over, he sought and won joint custody. He was working as a hospital aid at the time.

Relationship with children during marriage - Florence did the bulk of the child care while Tom worked to support the family. Tom was seen by Florence as being a good father and very responsible,

especially after the couple broke up. Her contact with Tom's parents was also positive.

Reasons for abduction - At the time of the abduction, Florence was living with the father of her second child. Her daughter was visiting Tom a great deal. Florence noticed a vaginal discharge after one visit with Tom and, following a visit to the doctor, learned that the daughter had gonorrhea. Both Florence and Tom went for tests and both were found to also have VD. Protective Services became involved and said that the daughter would have to go into foster care until this was resolved. A worker asked the daughter if anyone had touched her on her vagina and the daughter replied that "daddy" had. Florence was unsure if the daughter meant Tom or the man they were living with who the daughter also called daddy. Tom's family was very upset and put pressure on Florence to tell the truth about her suspicions but Florence feared that PS would remove her first daughter and the one she was about to give birth to if Florence accused her live-in lover. He had tested negative for VD. (Florence later recounted that she thinks her live-in lover, who was the abuser, was treated for gonorrhea a few months earlier and that is why he tested negative.)

"I was stressed out, in court all the time, and Tom was trying to defend himself and I did not want to lose the child. When my second child was born they came to my house every day. I had a legal aid lawyer and all the odds were against me so I picked up

and left. If I had told them it wasn't Tom I would have lost everything."

Events during abduction - "I flew out on a plane to PR to where my boyfriend's family lived. I flew out under an assumed name. I was miserable for the two months I was there and afraid Tom would find me."

How recovered - Florence was found because her new boyfriend's previous wife reported her whereabouts, "I was glad (I was found) because I was scared. Tom went to PR and got a lawyer and the police came and it was very scary." She describes her four year old daughter as being traumatized by the capture and did not want to return with her father at first. The daughter did return home with Tom who automatically gained custody, according to Florence, because of the abduction.

Current relationship with children and searching parent - Tom and Florence now have joint custody though the daughter (age 12) spends most of the time with him. "Tom and I get along well. He is a wonderful father. I see her every other weekend." Florence gave birth to a third child recently. She feels a great deal of guilt about what she did to her daughter, to Tom with the false accusations, and to herself. "I was young then and stressed out. I think people who take their kids are seen as being bad but they are doing it because they are scared and want to protect their

children. Counseling can help. I never had a chance to be young and you have to give anger a chance to cool off. I would now advocate for myself better and not get myself in that situation again."

Case #14

Background - Trudy is a 36 year old white hair dresser with a high school education and a religious background who abducted her two year old daughter in 1980 because she believed she would lose custody in court and that her child would be placed with a foster family temporarily while the court case was being decided. She also believed that her husband, with whom she had just tried to reconcile, was turning against her as he had been violent once. Trudy successfully hid her whereabouts for 11 years until she voluntarily contacted Child Find, Inc. who, over a few month period, helped her renegotiate contact between her daughter and ex-husband.

Significant childhood history - Trudy's parents divorced when she was young and she and an older brother were raised by a combination of parents and grandparents. Her mother was in sales and her father was a farmer and professional gambler. Neither parent was

described as having any criminal activity, substance abuse problem, or history of domestic violence. Trudy grew up feeling particularly close to her mother but not her father. She reported a few instances of sexual abuse at the hands of babysitters. Her parents were not aware of these events until she was an adult.

Her grades in grammar school were good but she just barely finished high school. As she reached high school she and her brother were increasingly separated in their living arrangements. There was always religion in her life, with experiences in the Church of Christ and with Baptists, and a strong emphasis on right and wrong.

Significant marital history - She dated an average amount in high school. When she graduated, she began working as a hostess in a restaurant where she met her husband who was working as a cook. He was 20, an immigrant from Lebanon, and she was 18. After a year they married. There were no instances of substance abuse or domestic violence during the courtship and she was not pregnant until a year after the marriage. Soon after the marriage they moved to Alaska because Trudy's mother was there and they had heard about opportunities to get rich quick with the pipeline expansion. They were successful and moved to Louisiana one year later, when their daughter was one year old, and opened a restaurant.

The marriage fell apart because, "We were from two different cultural backgrounds. He was a workaholic and wanted to get ahead and couldn't express any feelings. We were also too young." As

Trudy describes it, things moved very quickly once she decided to leave the marriage. She was falsely accused of having an affair and felt that everyone in the small town where they were living turned against her. His revenge for the humiliation was to demand custody of their daughter which he received even though she had been the primary caretaker during the marriage. The husband also received the apartment while she was given the car. She was granted weekend visitation. For a brief period, the couple attempted to reconcile. She agreed to sign a paper giving up certain claims on his finances if they reconciled. Her family and her lawyer advised her against it. Once she signed it, her lawyer resigned. She realized her mistake immediately and went to her husband to get the paper back and he was violent with her for the only time in the relationship. They returned to court.

As the case escalated, the husband threatened to abduct the child and the court forbid either parent to leave the state. Trudy could not visit her family with her daughter. The court then threatened to place the daughter in foster care while custody was straightened out.

Relationship with children during marriage - Trudy was the primary caretaker. Her ex-husband, while caring when with the daughter, was very involved in his work and did not spend much time with them.

Reasons for abduction - Trudy believed the court was going to give

custody to her husband, in part because the whole town had turned against her following a false rumor of her infidelity. She also worried about her daughter being placed in foster care and that her husband might become violent with her a second time. During a weekend visitation and following the daughter's second birthday party, Trudy, with the full knowledge and support of her family, abducted the daughter and drove to Arizona. Her mother was with her. They stopped in Tucson where the mother remained with them for a few weeks while they set up housekeeping and Trudy found employment. She had planned the abduction, had slowly sold her possessions, and had received money from her family. She believes there was no chance she would have gained custody through the court system.

Events during abduction - For the first five years she lived under her mother's maiden name, her mother's old social security number, and changed her first name. She got a driver's license using her mother's birth certificate with "whited out" dates. Her daughter's name was not changed. Her parents knew where she was and would call her from a neighbor's house but she would never call them. When they visited they were always careful about being followed. They had contempt of court charges filed against them but, according to Trudy, "Nothing ever came of it. I was always looking over my shoulder but there were no real problems. At one point my parents said they found out their phones were being tapped and my daughter and I ran to California for a month. But we

returned to Arizona and heard nothing else about it." A few years later Trudy remarried and moved to a different city. She has a son from the second marriage.

Over time her daughter would ask about her father. She had been trained by Trudy to not talk about her father in front of other people. About the reason for the abduction, Trudy told her, "We did not get along and we both wanted to raise you and that he wanted to raise her alone which I could not allow." Trudy further explains the relationship, "I never portrayed him as bad when she asked about him. As she aged and asked more questions I realized I wanted to contact him. I always knew where he was through anonymous calls to his home or business."

How recovered - A friend pointed out an ad to Trudy about Child Find, Inc. and after many months of indecision, calling and talking to mediators and hanging up, Trudy was able to begin negotiation for a meeting between her daughter and her ex-husband. All charges were dropped as part of the deal. Trudy's husband and family were opposed to the idea of a reconciliation but she persevered.

It was Trudy's sense of guilt about what had happened that drove her to contact Child Find, Inc. She does say, "If I had to do it again under those circumstances, I would have. There was no way out at the time. But it was hard. She should have been able to see her father all those years."



#### Current relationship with children and searching parent

The daughter was excited and curious about seeing her father. When they first saw each other two years ago after 11 years it did not go as he had wished. He hugged her a great deal and that proved a bit overwhelming for the daughter. She has remained standoffish from him since, and saw him only occasionally after that. She went to his home for a visit but has not seen him now for almost a year. "We were pushy with her at first but now we let her decide about the visits," Trudy said. He pays for her braces and sends gifts on holidays. The daughter is described as feeling some guilt about not wanting to see her father more. She does consider her step-father as the most important man in her life and continues to live with him and Trudy.

No time was spent in jail as part of the agreement. Trudy and her ex-husband are on good terms now. She sends him their daughter's school papers and recent pictures.

#### Case #15

Background - Len, a 57 year old white male, kidnapped his three children to Africa in 1986 when they were 13 (son), 8 (daughter), and 6 (son). Len left with them because their mother, who was an African native, had become "Americanized" and sought a divorce. Len was indignant at his wife's throwing him out of the house and his not having custody after all he felt he had done for her. This included bringing her to the U.S. from Africa and taking care of

her first born from a previous relationship. The children, half white and half Liberian, stayed in hiding for almost three years before Len sent back the eldest child so he could finish school. He then returned to the U.S. with the other children. He currently has no contact with them as they refuse to speak with him.

Significant childhood history - Len describes his upbringing as conventional - two parent middle class family where the father worked as a salesman and his mother was a homemaker. He had one younger brother and performed satisfactorily in high school. Religion was not emphasized though they attended a Protestant church.

Significant marital history - After college he was self-employed in business in Liberia where he sold insurance. When he was in his mid 30s he met and began cohabitating with his future wife who was a Liberian working as a secretary for the government at the time. She had a son from a previous relationship. They began living a traditional African life where the man was in charge of the family and the woman was subservient to him. This type of relationship, according to Len, allowed for some physical aggression on the part of the man toward the woman. "My ex-wife trained me to treat her as an African man would. I was the leader. In the U.S., feminists have changed things." (This training was at the root of the subsequent abduction.)

A few years later, they moved to the U.S. where she eventually

gave birth to three children. They married after a few years, in part, he says, because he represented a chance for her to move up in status. Their economic situation was marginal during much of their time together. At one point after she had worked as his secretary he asked her to go out and find work to help support the family. She found employment immediately. When he received a large commission and ordered her to return to the home because finances were no longer a problem and the children were having difficulty with her working, she refused. There were occasional battles, with him being surprised at one point when she threw a baby carriage at him because an African woman is not supposed to strike back. She learned that in the U.S. men are not supposed to hit women and during one altercation she called the police and had him removed from the house for a few days.

Eventually, she asked for a divorce and ended up remaining in the home. "It was a typical situation with immigrants - they come here, see how things are done and that is how they want to act. I was forced to leave the home." They stayed in contact after the breakup as his office was in the home. He would go there during the day and leave at night when she was at work.

Relationship with children during marriage - During the marriage, Len left most of the childcare to his wife. After the breakup, Len saw himself as more involved than the typical father as he would sometimes remain home with the children until his ex-wife returned from work.

Reasons for abduction - After the breakup, he began paying child support and visiting. "I was deeply resentful and angry at her that she was no longer the compliant, obedient wife and I was living an itinerant existence. In Africa, if there was a divorce and the children were over five they would stay with the father and the mother would leave the home. I was seeking joint custody in court and not getting it. I began planning for a year to leave with them for Africa and after writing to school systems found a job in Kenya. I sold everything and drove the children to the airport and told them we were going to Africa. As they were African children in part they had learned to accept whatever their father said and to not question it."

Events during abduction - "We arrived in Kenya and the job did not materialize so we moved on to Botswana. The government knew I was there after they traced my VISA card. During the next two years they did nothing to catch me, though, as men rule there. But I became weary of the travel and looking over my shoulder. I asked my ex-wife through the mail to come live with us at one point but she never responded. I would ask the children from time to time if they wanted to go back to the U.S. and they never said they did. I sent my son home after two years so he could finish high school."

How recovered - "I decided to fly back with the other two children

and arrived at the airport and called my ex-wife to say they were coming. I arranged for a taxi to take them home and went to a hotel. The next day I went to the Attorney General's office and turned myself in. I was tried the same day and let out on bail. I was eventually sentenced to 18 months in a local house of correction but only served nine months.

Current relationship with children and searching parent - "I expected to have visitation with my children but never did when I got out. I am unrepentant. I have been writing letters of attack to different judges and they won't let me see the children. The children refused to talk to me - I don't think they were angry when they got back. We had been fairly happy together. My daughter developed agoraphobia and did not go to school, wouldn't wash, and I think it was related to not seeing me. My youngest was suffering also - he broke down and started to cry at one point in school and went to therapy and I think is doing better.

"In my view the court system has been mean and vicious. In Africa, nothing like this would have happened. I would probably do it again and this time not bring the kids back. I know the mother suffered but in some way she made me and the kids suffer by asking for a divorce."

Case #16

Background - Jason is a 40 year old white male who has worked as an

rental agent for expensive condominiums. He abducted his children for one week because they were being continually abused and the courts were ignoring the evidence. When he took the children he was about to begin a custody hearing (he was the visiting parent.) He went to a different state, left them with friends, returned to court a week later for the custody hearing, and told the court the children's location. He believed the court would not turn them over to his ex-wife. The court arranged to have the children returned to her and Jason went to jail for five months. He currently has supervised visitation and is suing for sole custody.

Significant childhood history - Jason was one of four children, raised by both parents, his father a physician and his mother a housewife. He believes he was physically abused by his parents and discussed during the interview how he wanted to stop the cycle of abuse that is passed on from one generation to the next. The family was described as religious "on the surface," with no real commitment to moral issues. He was closer to his mother but not to an unusual degree. He was a marketing major in college and entered that field upon graduation.

Significant marital history - He had been married once before but that marriage had ended in part because his first wife was not able to get pregnant. He met the mother of his children when he was in

his early 30s and she was working as a waitress. They married a year later. Shortly after they announced their engagement, she became pregnant. He believes she planned the pregnancy because she was too insecure to believe that marriage would hold him in the relationship.

Jason was only slightly aware of a significant alcohol problem that she had during their courtship. Her problems became more evident during the marriage - she reportedly drank a bottle of wine every night and was seeking psychiatric help unbeknownst to him. She frequently tried to provoke him to violence against her but was unsuccessful. Despite these problems, the marriage was described as good for the first few years. A second child, a daughter, was born two years later, conceived in the hopes of saving the marriage.

Relationship with children during marriage - She became increasingly uninterested in the children. "She did not want to be a mom anymore. She would do everything possible not to be with them. And she started fooling around." He became very invested in them and felt his life revolved around them as he fed and dressed them everyday.

Reasons for abduction - The marriage ended when she left with the children, saying that he was not fun to be around anymore. According to Jason, she hid the children for a month before returning to their home town and getting an apartment. He noticed

upon their return that his daughter had razor cuts on her inner thighs and lower back. He called social services, the police, and anyone else he could find who would investigate the abuse. The abuse was verified but the authorities were unclear as to who the abuser was. A few months later, she was granted temporary custody with him having visitation, and he began paying child support. The abuse continued and appeared to occur on a monthly basis, Jason believes perhaps as a reaction to her menstrual cycle.

Additional court hearings were marked by her friends coming to testify against her but the judge refused to give him custody. Jason reports his son wanted to stay with him and not his mother. At one point Jason offered her \$1000 to increase visitation which she refused. "That made me think something bad had happened that she did not want me to see." The next chance he had, and during the time that a court hearing had been scheduled for another custody hearing, he took the children out of state and left them with friends.

Events during abduction and how recovered - The children were five and two at the time and thought they were on vacation. "They did not want to see their mother and talked to me about being beaten by her."

"If I see my kids are being hurt, I am going to try and protect them. I returned for the hearing a week later without the children and refused to tell my ex where they were. I almost did not tell the authorities either. But I did and they told her and



because she had custody they went and got them and I was placed in jail." He remained in jail longer than he thinks he would have because he kept threatening to take them again. At one point he was encouraged by his lawyer to plead temporary insanity, which he refused to do. He was also psychiatrically evaluated while in jail and found to be healthy. His lawyer was shocked at the harshness of the penalty given the fact that he did not ever conceal the whereabouts of the children from the court.

Current relationship with children and searching parent - He is currently suing for sole custody (nine months after the abduction.) He believes if he can prove child abuse, he will win. He has supervised visitation only and has been ordered to reside in a different state from his children. Jason thinks that courts are biased towards her because of connections she has in their town. He lives with his parents and reports almost no income.

"A lot of people advised me to take them and go into hiding but I did not and now the kids had the added trauma of seeing me locked up. I didn't take them because I think kids need both parents." Jason added, "The kids shutter when they are around her, according to the baby sitter. I know I did the right thing and had to take them out of the fire. It is a mess and I want to protect my children."

Would he do it again? "No - I would not leave town - If they were being abused I would go to the nearest emergency room and police. I am on probation now and walking on egg shells. Society

expects the mother to overreact to protect her kids but does not expect the father to do that. I acted like the protector and ended up in jail. I just wish the judge could see me for one day and know that I am not the typical father. My children cry for me every day. I feel like I took an awful lot in trying to break the cycle of abuse (he was never accused of abuse). I was not opposed to courts knowing where they were, just having them back with her."

#### Case #17

Background - Richard is a 54 year old white Methodist with a college education and an engineering degree. At the time of abduction he had a 13 year old daughter, a seven year old daughter, and a 10 year old Barry. Barry was the only child taken. He was first taken for four months and then again, a few months later, for four years when Richard could not gain custody. Barry wanted to be with Richard and Richard believes Barry was being abused and that it would be impossible to gain custody of Barry. After Richard and Barry were located (when the son was 15) they remained together until college.

Significant Childhood History - Richard was raised in a two parent family where both parents worked outside of the home. His father

appears to have had an occasional drinking problem which created some heated arguments with his mother. No physical violence was observed though Richard believes there must have been some. He felt fairly close to his parents when growing up. There was a strong emphasis in the home on not lying or stealing. Richard perceived himself as a success in school in science and drama. "I was a mover and shaker," he said.

Significant Marital History - Richard's courtship was unremarkable (no violence or substance abuse noted), with the couple marrying after one year and giving birth 11 months later. The couple grew apart because of "personality changes and disappointments in the relationship." No significant events of physical abuse, criminality, or infidelity were mentioned. Counselling was tried once or twice during the marriage but did not help.

Relationship with Children during marriage - He felt unusually close to Barry and not especially close with his daughters. "I was involved (with the children) but not as much as I should have been. I was like the guy next door. My son would just come to me and talk - he found in me someone he could communicate with."

Reasons for Abduction - The friction became worse after the divorce when his wife initiated actions to gain custody. She scheduled a meeting for him with a psychologist to be evaluated the same day she scheduled a custody hearing for herself. When he did not show

up in court, she gained custody and he was furious. Barry was living with him at the time and the decree resulted in his "being dragged out of school and sent back to his mother's home."

This began a long string of battles in court. "I felt I could not have survived otherwise so I had to take some action. Things were stacked against me and my lawyer was in cahoots with hers and filed papers late and (I kept on losing.) I had to get more lawyers, my boy was miserable, and there was no evidence that any of this would ever get worked out. I felt I could not have taken a step legally and there was some evidence he was being physically abused (kicked, jumped on, put in closet). So we disappeared. I did not feel I had any alternative (some slight guilt expressed with this.)" (He did not take his daughters because he did not feel as close to them and because he did not think they were being abused.)

In planning for the abduction, he went to the law library and examined the potential consequences of his actions. "I went to underworld types and figured out how to get a fake social security number and fake IDs and how to get him enrolled in schools. I had to pick a location where I could work for myself as an engineer. I picked him up on the way to school one day, gave him to an accomplice (a girlfriend) who took him by plane to another city where I met them. She mailed a postcard from there saying he was fine and then she drove him to a different state where I met them. Then we drove to another state where we stayed." In addition to the fake IDs, he had obtained Barry's medical records and changed

the names on those.

Events during Abduction - Barry was in total agreement with all of these actions, including a name change (but no physical changes). The goal was to stay in hiding until he was 18. The stress of a fugitive lifestyle ruined the relationship between Richard and the accomplice. No problems were reported with Barry during the period in hiding. His parents did not know where he was during that time.

How recovered - During the time they were in hiding, Richard believes that his wife was taunting the FBI to try and find them. "I became a thorn in the FBI's side. She told them I was dealing cocaine and when they caught me they had a whole SWAT team there and they ripped my room to shreds. She inferred I had some kind of unnatural relationship with my son."

They were found because "one of the baby sitters figured it out - I had gone to San Diego with a customer and that night they came for him. I was arrested there and spent a week before being released on probation. I was forced to plead guilty or else I would have been held without bail." Barry was returned to his mother. A year later, following continued and extreme problems with his mother, Barry returned to Richard.

Current relationship with Children and searching parent -  
Richard has a great relationship with Barry who graduated with honors from college and is a stockbroker. Barry has little contact

with his mother. Richard has almost no contact with his daughters, though one recently married and sent him a letter after the ceremony. The children have almost no contact with each other.

Would he abduct again? "I fear I would do the same damn thing only better; a guy doesn't stand a prayer."

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