

Lee's Story

I am a father to an 11 year old boy, and like many fathers found myself facing the harrowing prospect of losing my son.

The situation came about from a decision by my ex wife to relocate abroad.

From the onset it became very clear that both the legal and family system were clouded in a myriad of outdated myths, suppositions and historical judgements, which in essence significantly reduce the probability of a father gaining reasonable access let alone custody. In my own personal situation I held the belief that whilst I understood what needed to be done, I was indeed lost in terms of the law and its application; therefore I followed the route that many fathers have followed and sought 'professional' legal advice, which became the first obstacle of many.

In all I visited six different solicitors, the average cost of which to get them to take on my case was a minimum of £10,000, all of whom stated they needed to be paid before even a letter was sent. This cost is set to rise once letters go out, costs which rise significantly once at court given a barrister will be required.

This is where many fathers lose not only their case but their will to fight; not because as the press would have you believe that 'we simply do not care enough', but we meet solicitors who tell us it will cost thousands of pounds which we do not have, and that in any event, 'the odds are stacked against us'. What price our relationship with our children?

Steve Moseley and his daughter Savannah-Jade

Steve Moseley's daughter, Savannah-Jade Dawson, has been taken from England to live in Australia by her mother and her husband. It was against Steve and his family's wishes. The mother and her new partner promised under oath that she would let Savannah keep regular contact with her real father Steve and left a phone number and PO Box address with him. After relocation, the mobile phone number Steve had been given was disconnected and there were no replies to the many letters that Steve sent to the PO Box address.

Steve has no idea where Savannah is and neither he nor any of his family has had any contact with her since September 2007.

Steve has not given up. Despite a lack of help from the UK courts and Government, more than 25000 people have joined Steve's Facebook campaign

to find his daughter, or at least, let her know he still thinks of her and loves her.

You can help Steve find his daughter by sharing this website with your friends and colleagues. The more people see it, the greater chance that Savannah herself, or someone who can tell Steve where she is, will see it. Please visit Steve's website. If you have friends in Australia, and you use Facebook, please ask them to join Steve's Facebook group which is linked via his website.

As Steve says, '**how right do you have to be before the laws ever change?**'

<http://www.savannah-jade.org/>

The Custody Minefield is the most visited website on the internet on matters related to leave to remove, internal relocation and shared residence. The Custody Minefield provides legal advice and assistance to individuals and members of charities and was recommended by The Times in 2008.

The Custody Minefield self-help guide for separating parents was recommended by the Magistrates Association in 2007 and endorsed by the Divisional Chair of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

We are currently campaigning to change the law to improve outcomes for children and families caught up in leave to remove and relocation disputes.

Please visit www.thecustodyminefield.com and download our briefing report.

This report is important, timely and vital. To accept its findings, which could have and should have, been conducted at any time in the past 30 years, is to accept the awful conclusion that rather than Solomon like resolving our tragically human disputes with understanding, compassion and logical pragmatism the courts have consistently acted against society's interest through the application of prejudice, gender bias and awful impartial cruelty.

This report proves it. May God forgive them. I won't.

Sir Bob Geldof



Real life accounts of leave to remove and life after

Richard's Story

Not long ago, I woke up at 5am with a stiff neck, a headache and various other aches and pains. It took a minute or two to realise where I was, on the floor of an airport again. I was on my way back home after visiting my daughter for a day. Then an even bigger ache took over. Loss.

A month beforehand I had spent a joyous two days with her at home where she had her bedroom, toys, playmates, extended family. I treasured every minute of those two days, trying to ignore the cloud hanging overhead - the courts had given her mother the right to emigrate and the regular time and loving relationship that existed between my daughter and I counted for little. My involvement in my daughter's life would be reduced to a minimum and given the attitude of her mother, I couldn't even count on that. I wouldn't be there to comfort her if she fell, wouldn't be reading her a bed time story or sharing the flavour of each passing week that is so unique with toddlers. Even worse, I knew my daughter wouldn't want this but, being too young to express any kind of opinion, I was hurting for her too.

After returning my daughter to her mother that day (who dragged her away without so much as the chance for a farewell hug) I returned home to a scene that, after 18 months of battling in the courts, finally broke me; my daughter's toys strewn around her bedroom and the living room. That's when it hit home and I fell to pieces.

At first, I couldn't bring myself to tidy them up but eventually, I gathered them up and put them back in her room then closed the door. I gathered up all the photos mounted on the wall and put them into her room as well. Then I felt guilty about that, put them back and tried to come to terms with my situation. I had never allowed myself to feel bad for myself before but now I felt like a whipped dog.

When you become a father and hold your child for the first time, something magical happens. A little part of your heart comes alive, one you weren't even aware of before.

All kinds of thoughts and dreams fill your consciousness. How you will be there every moment. protect them from harm, make sure they never feel alone... love and protect them with every fibre of your being. You don't imagine this outcome....

Losing your relationship with your child is like a bereavement with no closure. I wake up, on the nights when I do sleep, and it's the first thing on my mind. I count the days, the hours even, until I see my daughter next. I wonder if I will, and fear that I won't.

The logistical problems in maintaining any level of contact are considerable and exact their own toll. Every penny goes on the travel costs. Spend the best part of a day on planes, trains, tubes and buses and, with the best will in the world, you won't arrive "bright-eyed and bushy-tailed" for contact. You can't let that show and you have to find the strength to put on a brave face and make sure your child has as happy and rewarding a visit as possible. It's going to be

a while before you have another chance. When the mother has a history of breaking contact orders, you can't even guarantee that next opportunity will arrive.

That fear and uncertainty saps your strength and hangs over every waking hour like a toxic cloud.

After I hand my daughter back, I go through the same journey in reverse sometimes spending a night on the airport floor to catch an early flight home and the whole cycle of grief, anger, fear and anticipation starts all over again. My heart goes out to fathers who have lost their children due to the mother's relocation. This is just wrong.

I remember reading that people diagnosed with a terminal illness go through different phases; disbelief, anger, grief and then acceptance. This is what happens when you lose your relationship with your child. First there is anger and disbelief that this type of emotional abuse can be permitted, then grief at the loss of the most precious thing in your life and finally an acceptance that it has happened, The difference is that acceptance, in this case, is more like resignation and brings no sense of calm or release – just an emptiness where the emotions used to be.

To support parents like Richard, a new downloadable factsheet on leave to remove is now available from The Custody Minefield website.