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Grandparents' Rights: What Every Grandparent Needs to Know

Patricia Perkins Slorah

1st Books Library, 2003, ISBN: 1-4107-6628-4 (e-book), ISBN: 1-4107-6627-6 (paperback)

Patricia Perkins Slorah, has written an easy-to-read book for grandparents who are considering assistance from the legal community to secure visitation with their grandchildren. The book is aptly titled, *Grandparents' Rights: What Every Grandparent Needs to Know*. For grandparents who are unfamiliar with the court system, Ms. Slorah provides helpful guidance. Although any book about the current state of the laws would be outdated at some point in the future as to what certain laws provide, this book provides timeless personal stories of grandparents who have struggled to gain visitation rights with their grandchildren.

For readers who are not grandparents, the book is an eye-opener about a growing societal problem – neglectful parents, abusive parents, or a parent who has lost a spouse and then turns his or her back on the children's grandparents. In several of the vignettes, grandparents became caregivers for their grandchildren and then sought legal visitation rights when their relationships with the parents became estranged, or when other problems surfaced such as divorcing parents, substance abuse, or death of a parent. State by state, legislatures are enacting laws for grandparents to have legal grounds for visitations with their grandchildren. At the heart of these laws is recognition on the part of legislatures that when dysfunction occurs in immediate family units, one solution may be to provide grandparents with rights to see their grandchildren.

The author tells the personal stories from the point of view of the caring and unappreciated grandparent. For instance, "As a member of the grandparent generation, I now believe we misled our daughters. We told them that because of new attitudes toward women, they could 'have it all.' We neglected to tell them they could not 'have it all at once.'" (page 4). An undercurrent throughout the book is that the parents are depicted as cold-hearted towards the grandparents' desires, neglectful of their children's need for basic necessities, or outright abusive. The author also briefly mentions instances of sexual abuse and physical abuse of children by their parents. Readers may be initially put-off by the one-sidedness of the point-of-view. For example, in describing a grandparent support group, Ms. Slorah writes: "[G]randparents told how their daughter or in-law would leave their grandbaby with 'just anybody' so she could go out and party." (page 41) Nevertheless, readers will eventually forgive the author when focusing on the book's purpose.

"Grandparents' Rights" would be a useful book for grandparents who seek visitation rights with children of cult members. But there are hurdles for grandparents in achieving visitation rights with grandchildren in or out of cults. For example, in New York, the law, Domestic Relations Law section 72, currently provides that the courts first examine whether the grandparents have standing. To establish standing, the grandparent can petition for visitation when there has been a death of the child's parent or "where circumstances show that conditions exist which equity would see fit to intervene." If standing is found, then the second inquiry that the courts must conduct is whether visitation is in "the best interest of the child."

For grandparents looking for answers, "Grandparents' Rights" provides readers with motivation, at the very least. The author describes how she took her family matters to court, testified in Congress, lobbied her state legislature, and took her story to the media. She also provided advice to those seeking it, and it sounds like her phone rang constantly. With that kind of determination described in this book, any reader would be inspired.

As in all legal matters, the author advises her readers to seek the advice of an attorney before attempting to "obtain[...] any rights through the court system" (p 119). Nevertheless, for those who cannot afford an attorney, she suggests appearing without one – "pro se" – if your state permits. The author describes in the appendix of the book the procedures in Florida for obtaining visitation. She also provides tips in the final chapter called, "Twelve Ways to Win."

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Robin Boyle, Esq.

Spiritual Intelligence, the Behavioral Sciences, and the Humanities

Frank MacHovec, Ph. D. Published by: The Edwin Mellen Press: Lewiston, Maine, Queenston, Ontario, & Lampeter, Wales, 2002, 291 pages

Frank MacHovec is a clinical psychologist who has taught at Rappahannock Community College and Christopher Newport University, both in Virginia. His main thesis is the belief that a "Spiritual Intelligence Quotient" (SIQ) is a constant in human history that frequently transcends organized religion.

The author illustrates this thesis with many examples from the realms of art, music, poetry, religion, and even politics. MacHovec's book ranges far and wide, including references from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, Abraham Maslow, B.F. Skinner, William Shakespeare, Eric Fromm, Abraham Lincoln, Mohandas Gandhi and many other sources. MacHovec devotes a large section of his book to Asian religions, but surprisingly scant attention is given to the Koran and Islamic teachings.

There are many charts that compare and contrast traditional organized religion with SIQ. There is a test for readers to determine one's SIQ rating. MacHovec is not anti-religious, but the book's constant refrain is his repeated declaration about a spiritual quality that exists outside of churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques.

This is certainly not news to any student of religion, but MacHovec goes to great, even excessive length to anchor SIQ in a scientific way that draws on sociology and psychology.

Few readers will question the author's assertion that compassion, self-esteem, love of others, reconciliation, and self-exploration are commendable goals. Nor will most readers challenge MacHovec's belief that one can gain spiritual satisfaction outside the confines of organized religion.

After extensive quotes from MacHovec's many spiritual mentors and lengthy descriptions of various religious beliefs, the author concludes with his eight cardinal principles of SIQ: there is a higher power outside ourselves that is positive and good, there is goodness in everyone, it is better to love than to hate, it is better to do good and give than to receive, all life is sacred, all men and women are brothers and sisters, truth is sacred whatever its source, and life is a mission as much as it is a career.

Perhaps MacHovec did not intend it, but the themes of his book are, in fact, not that different from sermons frequently preached in traditional religions' many houses of worship.

Rabbi A. James Rudin