

PROFESSIONAL FAMILY CONSULTANTS

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Francis Stewart, M.A., R. Psych.

PARENT & HOME OBSERVATION REPORT

FLD No. 117 of 2006
Judicial Centre of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Date of Observation: December 8, 2006
Date of Report: December 11, 2006

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

Guardians

MOTHER: [REDACTED]
Date of Birth: May 10, 1969
Education: Academic Grade XII (England) 1985
Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) 1990
Masters Degree (Art Therapy) 1994
Occupation: Art Therapist (Private Practice)
Family Therapist (Contract, [REDACTED] Reserve)

FATHER: [REDACTED]
Date of Birth: September 13, 1959
Education: Academic Grade XI, 1979
Bachelor of Administration (Local Government) 1994
Occupation: Truck Driver/Heavy Equipment Operator
[REDACTED] (Prince Albert)

Address: [REDACTED]
Prince Albert, Saskatchewan [REDACTED]

Telephone: (306) [REDACTED]
Date of Marriage: September 24, 1995

Child of Concern: [REDACTED] (DOB: [REDACTED])

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Purpose of Observation

█████ and ██████ have had legal guardianship of the infant child, ██████, since his birth on ██████. ██████'s biological father, ██████, has applied to the Court for custody of the child; a trial will commence on December 18th, 2006, to determine which parenting arrangements are in Liam's best interests. This writer was asked to conduct an observation session in order to appraise the ██████ family home environment and the quality of interaction among ██████, ██████ and ██████.

NOTE: This Report should not be viewed as an assessment of Mr. and Mrs. ██████'s capacity to parent the child in question, nor as a child custody and access assessment, as the crucial areas of evaluation that constitute such assessments are missing from the current Report. The writer does not necessarily accept as factual, the background information provided to him during the session with Mr. and Mrs. ██████, but is recorded here as this writer's understanding of the information, as conveyed by Mr. and Mrs. ██████. Finally, the background information provided by them has had no influence on the writer's observations, or the written record of those observations.

Background Information (Provided by ██████ and ██████)

█████ and ██████ reported that they have known ██████'s birth mother, ██████, for approximately nine years. When ██████ was pregnant with ██████, she contacted ██████ and ██████ to inquire whether they would be interested in obtaining legal guardianship over her unborn child, with a view toward eventual adoption. A Custody and Guardianship Agreement was reached approximately three months prior to ██████'s birth, and signed shortly after his birth. According to ██████ and ██████, ██████ could not positively identify the father of her unborn child. She was reported to have been surprised, however, when learning that Mr. ██████ was the father of the baby, as he had apparently informed her that "he was unable to father a child." Mr. ██████ has had access to ██████ since November 2nd, 2006. His access, which began for a period of one hour per week, and increased on November 30th to two hours per week, is supervised by Children's Haven in Prince Albert. To date, he has had eight one-hour supervised visits with ██████.

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It was Mr. and Mrs. [REDACTED]'s understanding that [REDACTED] had not consumed alcohol during her pregnancy, but she had reported occasional marijuana use. [REDACTED] has been with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] since the day of his birth. They reported that [REDACTED]'s immunizations are up to date and, outside of a previous brief episode of tonsillitis and a mild viral infection, the [REDACTED] have no concerns about [REDACTED]'s health. They reported that Liam seems to be reaching his developmental milestones at the expected age ranges.

[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] both described coming from happy, intact families of origin. There was a reported lack of substance abuse and violence in their respective families. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were married on September 24th, 1995. They described their marriage as "happy, stable, and secure", have had no separations, have no other children, and have a history of steady employment. Neither parent has been previously married, and neither have other children from prior relationships. Both parents denied having a history of criminal offences, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties. [REDACTED] and Nicola have adjusted their work schedules in order to ensure that one of them is home at all times to care for [REDACTED]. During those "rare and brief" occasions when they are unable to do so, they have relied upon one consistent alternate caregiver.

Home Observations

[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] reside on an acreage that they have owned for the past eleven years. Their four-bedroom home is situated on seventeen acres of land approximately [REDACTED] kilometers East of Prince Albert. The home is surrounded by three acres of mature trees and lawn. A number of corrals and equipment sheds/buildings are located a safe distance from the house. The exterior of the home and the grounds appeared to be well cared for and safe in all respects. No hazards were noted. The local school is located approximately fifteen minutes away, via school bus, from their home. The [REDACTED] own ten Registered Quarter Horses, a dog, and a small number of cats.

The interior of the [REDACTED] home was clean, well organized, and comfortably furnished. No safety hazards were noted. The main floor of the home contains photographs of the [REDACTED] family (including [REDACTED]), [REDACTED]'s feeding chart, an exersaucer, a variety of baby rattles and toys, a bassinet,

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and a large variety of enrichment material (e.g., books on psychology, child development, nature, and so on). ■■■■■'s bedroom, which is directly accessible from an adjoining door in ■■■■■'s and ■■■■■'s room, contains a crib, couch, desk, dresser, a number of pictures, stuffed animals, toys to promote gross and fine motor development (e.g., sizable rings, blocks), Little Tykes activity centre, a number of story books, and activities to promote the learning of colors and shapes.

Observation of Parental Interaction with Liam

Upon arriving at the ■■■■■ home, ■■■■■ and ■■■■■ immediately introduced ■■■■■ to the writer. ■■■■■, who was being held by ■■■■■, immediately turned his head away from the writer and snuggled himself into ■■■■■'s chest. Although ■■■■■ smiled frequently at the writer's attempts at interaction, throughout the three-hour period of observation, ■■■■■ clearly showed a preference for, and comfort with, interacting with ■■■■■ and ■■■■■, even when the writer presented small toys, rattles, and so on to ■■■■■. When holding ■■■■■, both parents made frequent and appropriate eye contact, particularly when engaging him verbally. ■■■■■ babbled almost constantly with his parents, which was reciprocated immediately by ■■■■■ and ■■■■■. Smiles, laughter, and contact comfort (hugs, caresses) was displayed willingly by both ■■■■■ and ■■■■■ and reciprocated by ■■■■■. At one point during the observation session, ■■■■■ became quite fussy. While a bottle was being prepared, both parents offered soothing remarks and comfort to ■■■■■. ■■■■■ maintained constant eye contact with ■■■■■ during his feeding, and ■■■■■ curled up beside her, eventually falling to sleep while holding her hand. ■■■■■ also changed ■■■■■'s diaper on two occasions during the session, speaking both in a soothing tone of voice and, at times, in a more jovial manner. ■■■■■ appeared to respond well, babbling and smiling throughout the changing process. Both parents maintained positive facial expressions at all times when interacting with Liam.

Overall, the verbal and physical interchange between the parents and ■■■■■, along with their apparent ability to respond to his needs appropriately and affectionately, indicated that a secure level of attachment had developed between them and ■■■■■. Other observed signs of ■■■■■'s secure attachment to ■■■■■ and ■■■■■ included ■■■■■'s apparent willingness to seek out and accept the comfort of his parents, his willingness to accept and reciprocate hugs and other forms of contact

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comfort, his overall positive responsiveness (smiles, laughter, other verbal responsiveness) to both parents, his good eye contact with both parents, his relaxed body posture while being held, and the clear preference for his parents over the attempts of interaction by a stranger. Further, [REDACTED] displayed excitement when one of the parents re-entered the room following a brief period of separation. During these occasions, Liam would hold out his arms to the returning parent or jump excitedly in his exersaucer, likely as a form of greeting or gestures at welcoming contact. Overall, during the three-hour period of observation, this writer did not notice any negative behaviour, either on the part of the parents or the child, that would be a cause of parenting concern or disturbed attachment.

Conclusions

[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] are involved in a dispute over the custody and/or access of [REDACTED] (currently seven and one-half months of age). [REDACTED]'s biological father, [REDACTED] presently has two hours of supervised access to [REDACTED] per week. This writer is not aware of the circumstances surrounding the reasons for supervised access or, in fact, about any significant aspects of his parenting and, as such, no suppositions will be made about his parenting or whether it differs in any way from the parenting style of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] have had a stable, twelve-year marriage that has been free of separations, substance abuse and violence. They seem enthusiastic about the prospect of parenting, and displayed pride when speaking of [REDACTED]'s developmental growth and accomplishments. There is no question that the quality of their home environment is conducive to the current emotional and cognitive needs of [REDACTED], and both parents seem to be aware of [REDACTED]'s developmental needs and stages of emotional, social and physical growth. The variety of developmental texts and infant/toddler-parent books present in their home offers support to that fact, and both parents described themselves as "avid readers".

One major aspect of parenting observed by this writer was the quality of attachment that [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] have to [REDACTED]. Attachment is generally referred to as the unique emotional relationship

that develops between an infant and his or her primary parent or caregiver. In essence, attachment is the first form of love that is experienced in life, and it provides the working framework for all subsequent relationships that the child will develop. A secure, healthy attachment has three key elements: a) the attachment is an enduring emotional relationship with a specific person, b) the relationship brings safety, comfort, security, and pleasure to the child, and c) loss or threat of loss of the attachment figure evokes intense distress in the child. Permanent loss of the child's attachment figures typically results in chronic behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties for the child, which often extend into their teen and adult relationships. Secure attachment begins to develop immediately following the birth of a child, and comes about partly through repetitive bonding experiences (physical proximity, positive physical touch such as holding and rocking, smiling, singing to the child, face-to-face interactions, and so on), and consistent, loving parenting. Again, from the interactions observed among [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED], it is this writer's professional opinion that a mutually positive interactive relationship, indicative of secure attachment, has developed between [REDACTED] and his parents.

Respectfully submitted,



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