

Both parents say the other shouldn't have custody

KIDNAPPING, from Page 1

the friend did not send it to him in Texas.

That does not explain why he never called Tohanna to tell her he would be bringing the boys back, though. She says he did not contact her at all while she was gone.

Tohanna had custody hearings without him, Mark said, and he claims she told Judge Jack Burr lies. In a custody evaluation by Sunflower Family Service Inc., Tohanna claimed that Mark came home one day after having spent the last of their money on marijuana. She said they needed diapers, and she said she told him, "You suck as a father!"

He said he threw a can of soda at her head and threatened her. Tohanna said the next day, Mark told her, "The only way to clear your head is to put a bullet through it."

Mark said he never made that statement or threatened her but that she had told the judge those things to get a Protection from Abuse order and have him removed from the house.

In the custody evaluation, Tohanna said Mark smoked marijuana throughout their marriage. Mark said he tried marijuana in the 1970s, and it made him sick. He said he has never used illegal drugs.

Mark said his ex-wife has repeatedly dragged him into court for custody hearings, and he has not been heard. The judge only listens to Tohanna, he claims, and he says the lawyer he hired did not represent him well.

Information in the Thompsons' domestic relations file at the Sherman County courthouse says Mark filed for sole custody of the children and asked for child support payments from Tohanna in December 2000, and that she has filed motions asking for custody, child support from Mark and for "parenting time" with the children.

The family services evaluator, Teresa Witthuhn, said that both parents are capable of parenting the boys but recommended that Tohanna have residential custody because Jonah and Job need to build a relationship with their mother and because she felt Tohanna would be more likely to cooperate with co-parenting.

Witthuhn said in her report that a break in the relationship between the younger boys and their mother could lead to severe behavior problems, low self-esteem and cause them to mistrust others, especially their mother.

She said Tohanna and Mark have used the boys as tools of revenge.

Accusations that the travel trailer Mark and the boys took to Texas was dirty and that the kids were cooped up are not true, Mark said. The kids played in the city park, he said, and were not kept hidden. He claims the kids were having "the time of their lives."

"All of the charges against me are false," Mark said, adding that he feels he has already been tried and convicted "in the newspaper."

That is not the story the boys are telling.

Though they say they love their father, Jaeger and Jacob said they did not enjoy the trip to Texas. They were not allowed outside much, the boys said, but had to go to the bathroom outdoors. Smee said the boys and their father

were found Monday, Jan. 28, about 20 miles outside Austin, Texas.

The Bastrop County Sheriff's Office received an anonymous complaint that day, the chief said, that a man was moving children from a brown suburban to a camper. The caller said the man had wrapped the children in a blanket, Smee said, and was acting very suspicious.

A deputy was sent to check out the situation, the chief said, and spoke to Mark Thompson. He ran a check on Thompson, Smee said, and found he had the warrant in Goodland and there was a federal warrant for unlawful flight to avoid prosecution.

After the boys were found, Texas Child Protective Services called the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services here, Tohanna said, and said they needed to follow up on the care the boys had received with their father. The Kansas agency determined that Mark had neglected the boys when he left them unsupervised long enough for Job to burn himself playing with a cigarette lighter.

The agency's report said Mark had left the boys alone in the Suburban while he went into a pawn shop. The agency said it had determined seven months earlier that Jaeger and Jacob could not supervise the younger boys, the report said, and Mark agreed and promised not to leave them alone.

Mark was brought back to Goodland, and after a hearing in February, was released on a \$15,000 signature bond. Tohanna said she thought he should have had to pay bail. She is outraged that he was set free, saying it trivializes what he did.

Tohanna says she's afraid Mark will take the kids again and she doesn't want her kids to have to live with that fear.

"How can I not be angry?" she asked. "These are my kids who were taken. We're the victims, and he's the one getting sympathy."

Tohanna's the one getting sympathy, Mark replies.

"She's a drama queen," he said, "who has made this all about her."

She signed the kids over to him, Mark said, when she wanted to live with a man in Burlington. But when that didn't work out, she wanted the kids back. Tohanna said she never signed the kids over to Mark and that she moved to Burlington to be closer to her job, not to live with a man.

"When he (Mark) told me to leave," Tohanna said, "I had a job there and had to move because I had no car."

Tohanna said she signed an informal statement giving residential custody of the children to Mark when she tried to reconcile with him.

"He would not let me move in with him if I didn't write that," she said. "I was trying to give my children a happy family life, and I thought that was the only way to do it."

Mark said Tohanna moves in with men so they will pay the bills for her.

"She didn't want to pay bills," Mark said, "so she got someone to replace me — that is to try to replace me. I'm kind of irreplaceable."

Mark said he offered to give the boys to her and pay \$200 a month for child support. Her attorney said that wasn't enough money, Mark said, so she demanded more. Tohanna said she was just

Anyone who sees child abuse should act

It is tough for the public to measure the performance of child protective service agencies, says Randy Burton, founder of Justice for Children, and even tougher to hold them to definite standards of accountability.

Because of privacy laws, it is hard to find out what they are doing in any one case or how they rate overall. He recommends that anyone who witnesses or suspects abuse get involved. Steps Burton says to take are:

- Report the abuse to the police and to protective services, in Kansas, the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services. In Goodland, call police at 899-4570 or dial 911 if the abuse is

in progress. The state Social and Rehabilitation Services number is 899-5661. County Attorney Bonnie Selby may be reached at 899-4820, and the county sheriff, for areas outside the city, at 899-4835.

- Find out who the caseworker is and contact him or her to determine the status of the case.

- Contact the responsible police officer and determine the status of his investigation. Ask if he has forwarded his report to the county attorney's office, and, if he hasn't, ask when he will.

- Contact the prosecutor and, if you have facts of the case, make sure the

prosecutor is aware of these and that you are listed as a potential witness.

- If the police officer has decided not to refer the case to the prosecutor, or if the caseworker has failed to report the case to the police, find out why and keep notes on the process.

- If you are not satisfied with their reasons, contact Justice for Children at (713) 225-4357.

- Consider contacting the newspaper to see if pressure can be applied to the system.

- If the child is in your custody or that of a friend or relative, take the child to a doctor who has experience in diagnosing child abuse.

- If sexual assault is suspected, insist that a rape kit be prepared, and if the child has bruises, take pictures.

Justice for Children has worked to keep the public informed regarding the problems of child abuse, their brochure says, especially how to recognize and report crimes against children.

The organization has been featured on "PrimeTime Live," "Good Morning America," "Donahue" and "The Justice Files."

For more information, contact their web site at www.jfcadvocacy.com, www.jfcadvocacy.org or www.justiceforchildren.com.

Child advocacy group formed to help abused

As a former member of the system designed to protect victims of child abuse from being re-abused by their family and 'loved' ones, I can testify that the system currently in place is an utter failure.

**- Randy Burton
Justice for Children**

Justice for Children is a national advocacy organization with headquarters in Houston.

A brochure says the organization was founded in 1987 by Randy Burton and a group of citizens in response to "the failure of the child protective system to protect abused and neglected children." Burton is a former chief prosecutor of the Family Offenses Section of the Harris County district attorney's office.

The organization's purpose is to advocate for abused children not properly protected by the state agencies required by law to do so, Child Advocate San C. Ta said.

The group has worked to put child abuse in the public eye and has made proposals to legislators to change laws dealing with domestic relations, she said.

"Our goals are to focus public attention on this problem," Ta said, "and to assist the different governmental agencies involved in child abuse cases."

Most states require any adult who suspects that a child is being abused to report that to either the police or child protective services, Burton said. These laws were intended to ensure

that kids receive adult help in getting reports of abuse into the criminal justice system.

In Kansas, professionals, such as doctors and teachers, who deal with children are required by law to report child abuse, said Gene Dawson, area director of the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services. There have been very few problems in Kansas, he said, with those required by law to report child abuse.

Though not everyone is required by law to do so, Dawson said, anyone knowing about child abuse should report it.

"Children in many cases do not have the ability to make their own reports of these crimes," Burton said,

"due to their age or the fact that they are virtual prisoners in their homes where the abusive parent or relative also lives."

But the protective services and police departments often do not ensure the protection of abused children, he says. Nationwide, Burton said, of the children who died from abuse and neglect, almost half had case histories of abuse or neglect in the family.

"As a former member of the system designed to protect victims of child abuse from being re-abused by their family and 'loved' ones," Burton said, "I can testify that the system currently in place is an utter failure."

Dawson said the system in Kansas is absolutely not a failure. One very public failure nationwide can paint a bad picture for the whole system, he said, but a vast majority of the cases handled in Kansas have been a success.

"Considering that it's an extremely complicated and emotional arena," Dawson said, "we are doing a very good job."

Dawson said organizations like Justice for Children are needed to keep the problem of child abuse and

the problems with the current system before the public. The system operates very well every day, he said, but he concedes that it does not succeed in every case and needs help from others.

"It's everybody's business to protect our children," he said.

Some of the reasons for the failures in the system, Burton said, are the priority the agencies give to preserving the family and the fact that they often are accountable only to themselves.

"In 1980," he said, "a financial incentive in the form of federal funds was established to encourage preservation of the family unit."

Protective services have thus assumed that to be of equal value to protecting the child, he said, and have "shown a marked bias towards preservation of the family at the expense of the child's safety."

Dawson said the Social and Rehabilitation Services have worked with a family preservation agency but does not preserve the family at the expense of safety.

The Kansas agency has court-appointed advocates to look for the interests of the child, he said.

following her lawyer's advice.

Although his taking the kids out of the state prompted Judge Burr to give Tohanna full custody at a hearing Jan. 16, Mark said he is planning to seek custody of the boys again. Tohanna manipulates them, he claimed, and abuses them emotionally.

Tohanna said she does not lie to her children, does not bad-mouth their father in front of them and lets them make up their own minds about whether to believe her or Mark.

"I don't need to lie to be a good parent," she said. "If I did that, they (the boys) would only resent me when they get older."

Mark says he needs to protect the children from Tohanna, but she says he is just trying to hurt her.

"I will fight for my children," he said, "to protect them from Tohanna's abuse."

"When our marriage ended, I moved on," she says. "I wish he would move on and quit trying to hurt me."

Donlay in back

Researcher looks to lower bean gas

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — Researcher Sam Chang is on a mission: He is looking for ways to break down the "flatulence sugars" in beans before they create an audible side effect.

Besides improving what he calls the "social-behavior status" of beans, the project could lead to products that provide high protein and fiber without producing intestinal gas.

Chang, a researcher at North Dakota State University, has kept a sense of humor about his work.

"As a researcher, when people ask what we do and we say beans, people start to laugh," he said.

Flatulence science, as Chang explains it, works like this: Beans contain sugars called raffinose oligosaccharides, which cannot be broken down by human enzymes. The molecules sur-

vive the digestive tract until they reach the large intestine, where they fall prey to bacteria that ferment them.

The process produces gases — methane, hydrogen and carbon dioxide. The result, embarrassing for

adults, can be painful for infants, eliminating otherwise healthful beans as an ingredient in baby food.

Solving the problem could boost demand for beans in both adult and baby foods.

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