



Fathers more often gaining custody as view of family changes

This is the third in a series of stories on family life styles.

by KAYE BARTON

Kip Frey lives on a mountain road east of Sandy with 10 chickens, seven goats, three dogs, a friend named Emily and his son, Jacob.

Jacob is three but has lived with his father only a matter of months. Divorce had separated them for two and a half years except for visits, until Frey took over Jake's custody this summer.

Frey says this arrangement is possible because society's view of the family is changing. "There is greater acceptance of the fact that the father-child relationship is just as natural and important as the maternal," he said.

"I don't officially have legal custody of Jake," he said. "It's what the courts call physical custody. I have him in my care by mutual agreement with his mother.

"I hope to make it a permanent arrangement, though — and the way it looks now, it would be uncontested."

Frey wasn't sure of his ability to care for his son. He was unfamiliar with the role of parent, and he didn't know his son well. He had a lot of apprehension about stepping into the situation unprepared.

"I didn't know what kind of behavior to expect from Jake, or from any 3-year-old," he said. "He had habits I didn't approve of, and I didn't have the slightest idea of how to correct them."

A local couple who are opening a day care center filled the gap, however, and provided Frey with a program suited to Jake's needs. Don and Carol Zimmerly, of Mt. Hood Day Care Center, have Jake in their care four days a week.

The Zimmerlys have been, in effect, training Frey to train his son. "They've been great," he said. He also relies on the advice of friends who are parents of small children to learn what to expect from his son.

"But I'm not really raising Jake alone," Frey pointed out. "Emily is here with me and we work at it together." The couple has been together approximately two years.

Both report positive results from Jake's attendance at nursery school. "This is kind of an isolated place, and it's a limited environment for Jake," Frey said. "There's no one for him to play with.

"In pre-school he learns how to give and take with other youngsters and how to behave socially," he continued. "I think it enriches his life.

Because the center is staffed by a husband and wife team, Emily believes Jake may avoid forming stereotypes about what is acceptable for men to do and what is expected of women.

"I think it's also good for him to see both Kip and me going to work every day," she said. "I'm not his mother, but I'm the maternal figure in his life. I'd like to help him see that not everybody has to fit the same pattern — that there is more than one way to live."

Frey emphasized that he is not raising his son according to a political formula. "I guess the only thing I'm opposed to is violence. I try not to use corporal punishment," he said.

"My reasoning tells me that spanking a child only strengthens his aggression, so I try to use other forms of discipline," he said. "But there are times when I still rely on the good old-fashioned whack."

Neither Kip or Emily attend church, and they talked about how that might affect Kip's son. "We want to avoid indoctrinating him into some narrow, rigid set of beliefs," Emily said. "I thought it would be a great idea to start when he's six or seven or eight and attend all different kinds of worship services so he's exposed to the idea of religion."

"I guess I just want to give Jake basic values," Frey said. "I want him to have tolerance and honesty and good taste. We're mostly proceeding on the belief that if we lead our lives in a good manner, he'll emulate us."

Frey shrugged. "I don't really have a childraising philosophy yet. It's something that's evolving day by day. I'm still a total amateur."



Kip and Jake share a story.

Kip Frey just assumed custody of his three-year-old son this summer. "I don't really have a childraising philosophy yet," he said. "It's something that's evolving every day. I'm still a total amateur."



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