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To the Attorney for Mrs. Marylou Vesco

Dear Sir:

At your request I examined your client, a thirty-two year old white, unemployed business school student, currently living on welfare, on April 1, 1975. Mrs. Vesco is a thin, attractive woman who appeared anxious during the interview. She made every effort to please the examiner. She was neatly dressed, clean, cooperative. She smokes heavily and spoke clearly, relevantly, without evidence of psychotic thought disorder, hallucinations or delusions. She is well-oriented and her memory is not impaired. She showed labile affect, appropriate to the content of her presentation. At times she would cry, at other times she would become angry, and at other times she would smile appropriately.

Mrs. Vesco indicates that she is currently attempting to regain custody of her twelve year old son, Robert, who was taken from her "by mistake" at a hearing six months ago. At that time she had been very concerned about her recent onset of illness, a serious blood disorder called pernicious anemia, and had become anxious and depressed. She began to drink heavily, which has been her method of handling anxiety and depression, and on one occasion became drunk and fell down, harming herself, requiring hospitalization. At that time her ex-husband, father of Robert, took custody of Robert with his new wife and several stepdaughters. There was a hearing, allegedly for custody, but which Marylou felt was for support, and did not attend. Consequently she defaulted and custody was given to Donald, Robert's father. Since that time Marylou has made conscientious efforts to regain custody of her son.

She has had a problem with drinking, especially about the time of the separation and divorce, when it was determined that Donald had found another woman and she felt rejected and depressed. Her drinking became worse but did not interfere with her work as a telephone operator, bank teller and securities clerk. About a year prior to her hospitalization she began psychotherapy to help with her depression and her drinking. She claims that the psychotherapy was not helpful and she stopped after about a year. Two months later she became increasingly anxious and began therapy again with a new therapist, whom she claims is quite good and from whom she has gained a great deal. She has not been drinking during the past four months, has been attending school, intending to get a degree in accounting while she is living on welfare, and aided in her tuition by the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation. She is very concerned about her son and his unhappiness since he has lived with his father. She feels it has been unfair for her and for her son that he was taken from her as he had no difficulties living with her during the many years that they lived alone together since the separation and divorce. He apparently has done quite well in school and has not shown signs of behavior or other emotional problems during the period they were living together.

She has made a concerted effort to rehabilitate herself, is in hopeful psychotherapy at present, and has ceased her drinking.

*Past History* reveals that Marylou was raised in Philadelphia, the product of a strict Irish Catholic background, attending a girls' Catholic school. She started dating Donald when she was sixteen and they were married a year after her graduation, in 1961, from

Little Flower High School. This was the first marriage for both. Robert was born one year after the marriage. The marriage was not approved of by either family and they had difficulties with in-laws from the beginning. Donald is a year older and has been with the state police for thirteen years, and is currently a sergeant. Marylou helped him through the Academy and apparently is brighter than he, being able to help him with his academic work. Donald apparently was away from the home quite a bit during the early years of Robert's life and with the necessity of her caring for Robert much of the time and with Donald being away, she became irritable and nervous. The family disputes occurred and Donald began sleeping away and not coming home evenings. The care of Robert became almost exclusively Marylou's responsibility.

It was about that time that Marylou learned that Donald had been seeing another woman and requested a divorce. When they separated she moved in with her parents, was increasingly depressed and anxious, and felt rejected, began drinking about that time.

She has had no previous history of psychiatric illness and has not felt the need to seek psychiatric treatment prior to her recent experience. She has had no previous serious illnesses, until the time she learned that she had pernicious anemia, about six months ago, at the time of her anxiety and drinking bout which resulted in her hospitalization and the eventual loss of custody of her only son, Robert.

In addition to the examination of Marylou, I had the opportunity of interviewing and examining Robert Vesco, age twelve. Robert appears to be a bright, sensitive, perceptive twelve year old lad who was able to discuss quite openly his disappointment at the break-up of his once intact family. He would prefer to live with both his mother and father but knows that he cannot do so at present. He recalls earlier in his life that he did not spend much time with his father and wishes that he had done so, and recalls spending a great deal of time with his mother, who at times has been over-protective of him. He indicated that he preferred to live with his mother, they had been very close, and he has lived with her for most of his life. He was having a difficult time getting used to the adjustment of living with his father and stepmother, but says very complacently that he would make the adjustment if he had to, because he did not want to cause any trouble. He recalls his mother drinking in the past and he did not like her behavior when she was drinking. He expresses affection for his father and wants to spend more time with him but knows that he can't because of his job. He describes no particular problems with his father and stepmother, or with his mother, but says he has been having some increasing difficulty in school because of behavior situations which everybody gets involved in. He is in the same school that he attended when he was living with his mother and he prefers it that way. He would like to have his own room but preferably would live with his mother and spend more time with his father when his father had the time to come and see him. At present he is spending most of the time with his stepmother and would prefer to spend that time with his own mother.

There is no psychiatric difficulty with Robert Vesco.

*Summary and Recommendations:* On the basis of my examination of your client, Marylou Vesco, and her son, Robert, the following conclusions are reached:

1. Marylou Vesco has had a serious drinking problem for which she has sought and received psychiatric treatment. Her earlier treatment was not helpful nor successful, but her current therapy has proven to be helpful to her and successful and she has not been drinking for the past four months. There are no psychiatric contraindications at this time for her caring for her son in a full time custodial capacity. She shows warmth and affection for her son and he shows a return feeling for her.
2. There are no psychiatric problems with Robert Vesco. He has not been seriously

damaged emotionally by the separation of the custodial arrangements with his mother. He does tend to show a complacency and an unwillingness to cause difficulties between his parents. His wish to live with his mother at this time is a sincere one and not based on coercion by his mother or threats from his father.

3. Since I have not had the opportunity of examining Mr. Vesco, I am not in a position to state whether or not Mr. Vesco would be a better parent than Mrs. Vesco to her son. However, I am in a position to state very clearly that at this time Mrs. Vesco is a good parent and would not emotionally harm or damage her son if she maintained custody of him.

4. I would encourage increased visitation by Mr. Vesco when he makes the time to see his son and spend meaningful and significant time with him during visitation periods.

5. Because of the restricted interview situation; i.e., not being able to examine Mr. Vesco, I cannot say for certain that Robert would be in a better position to be with Mrs. Vesco, but my conclusion, under the circumstances, with the information that I had available to me, is that he ought to be placed with Mrs. Vesco for two reasons:

A. Because he has spent most of his life with her, is comfortable with her and the continuity of care principle is one that ought to be adhered to.

B. His wish is to live with his mother, and at age twelve, I believe that a child, especially one who is bright and perceptive, as Robert is, ought to be in a position to have some say in his placement and disposition.

Hoping the above will be helpful.

Yours very sincerely,  
Robert L. Sadoff, M.D.

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