

Chapter Twenty-One: The Parent-Child Contract

Blood Oath

Noun phrase: a solemn promise to keep an agreement using each party's sense of honor or reputation to uphold the deal. – *uslegal.com*

"Remember, if I were to die because you exposed my crimes, guess whose fault that will be? Guess whose hands will have my death on them?"

Precious. That is the only word that comes close.

Precious is what children are. If you are a parent, your child should be the most precious thing to you. Period!

If you are fortunate enough to be a parent, you know as I do, the word *precious* doesn't even begin to describe what your child means to you. It falls tremendously short as a word to describe the most beautiful and extraordinary thing in one's life. I honestly wish I could come up with a better word, but every word one I think to replace it fails. In all honesty, if your child means half as much to you as my children mean to me, no word is adequate to describe your feeling for them.

Both my children are almost thirty years old, and I cannot put into words just how special it is to be their father. I don't hesitate to say the feelings I expressed are probably the same for most parents regardless of race, religion, political belief, country in which they live, sexual orientation, education, or whether they are poor or rich or fall in between. Whenever I am asked by expectant new parents to describe being a parent, all I can do is raise both my hands out to the side, sigh, and say, "How do I begin to describe a love that has no bounds?" How do I honestly impress upon someone an emotion so strong? I can't. It is impossible.

My wife once described it this way: "It is the most empowering thing, and yet it can be the one thing that brings you to your knees because you feel you will do anything to protect your child, which can put you at your most vulnerable."

If you have never been a parent, you need to understand a couple of things. Above all, our children are the one thing we should not hesitate to give our lives for. For most parents, their children are the unquestioned center of their universe, and that is as it should be. Second, it's not about responsibility or obligation. It is about emotional connection - a deep, symbiotic, spiritual joining so profound that nothing rivals it. You are emotionally joined in such a way nothing in Heaven or Earth should break the connection. You can never escape the relationship. You can never hide from it, nor deny it.

However, the natural bond between you and your children can be damaged beyond repair. Differences can be a fathoms-deep abyss so dark they never see the light of day. Your physical and emotional relationship can be irreconcilable to the point that you never speak to each other. Your feelings for one another can become non-existent. Children may say to their parents, "I hate you, and I never want to see or talk to you again." Parents may scream, "You are no child of mine." Children may take their parents to court to try to sever the relationship for all time. However, the spiritual bond between you, which may appear to hang by a thin spider thread, can never be completely broken. It is like all contracts, which means after reviewing the initial agreement and finding it to be grossly unethical or fraudulent, it can be broken. But in the realm of the divine, it is a deep spiritual oath that can never die. You and your children belong to each other. Forever.

As a parent of two adult children, a son and a daughter, I knew when they were born what I felt for them was unassailable. The overwhelming feeling was something I could not touch or see, but it permeated the room. It was a truth that was incontrovertible. I could not then, and I

cannot now, put my feelings into words. When my son and daughter came into the world, and I first saw them and held them – so tiny, so innocent, so *vulnerable* - *there was no question in my mind, they were divine love.*

As men, we hear how the Mother's connection with our children is much deeper:

"I carried that baby for nine months, I ate for two for my baby, I lost sleep for my baby, I lost my figure for my baby, I went through crazy hormonal changes for my baby, I got smacked and kicked in the stomach for months by my baby, I've got this six-inch-long scar tissue across my belly for my baby, and I will never get my body back for my baby! And what did you men do? You waited nine months for the baby. Then you took pictures of you with a grin, snipped the umbilical cord and held the baby like you did something special."

We men cannot fully comprehend what women have to go through to give birth. We can only experience the emotional connection with our child through their words as they describe what is going on with them and our babies. We cannot fully understand the pain and sacrifice women go through, and yet it is that pain and sacrifice that creates the indescribable connection with our babies. However, that does not mean men cannot have a profound emotional connection with our babies as well. I would go so far as to say it is not a contest between the Mother and the father, even though it feels that way at times. Hopefully, it is a process we choose to go through together.

When looking at my baby, all I saw as a father was my child, willing to love and trust me unconditionally. Most babies will have a loving parent or parents who will teach and nurture them through life's difficulties as they begin to embrace an unknown world of possibilities that unfolds before them. They will approach each new day with unbridled wonder, believing they are loved and will always be treasured unconditionally by their parents.

When fathers first pick up our newborn babies, we hold a divine being of our own creation – and cradle him or her in our arms. It is an extraordinary feeling that can only be described as miraculous. If this is what it feels like for me, a man, a father, what must it feel like for a woman, a Mother? My goodness.

When we look into that face, touch those tiny fingers and lift those tiny toes, we are in awe at the miracle before us. When we feel just how little our baby weighs and begin to imagine pre-school, play dates, birthdays, graduations, prom, first car, days spent at the beach or in amusement parks, first crushes, crying over loves found – lost and found again – going off to college or the military, first jobs, nights sitting together watching classic black and white movies with a bucket of popcorn, Red Vines and a box of Mike and Ike as the rain pounds outside, holidays, teaching them about sex, and on and on - emotions can overwhelm us because we know a life that had reached its joyous zenith with our wife has gone to a realm beyond our imagination. Mothers are able to imagine their new life with their new baby because the evidence is undeniable. It has been moving inside them, trying to kick and punch its way out for nine months. Men, what do we have? A pregnancy wand and a black and white ultrasound image, but it is enough. It truly is.

Be it our first child or our eighth, we will look at a white piece of plastic with a thin blue line in a tiny window, or an out of focus grainy image as our only evidence of our baby and say to ourselves, "Look at what I've created! I've created this tiny living person—a human being of pure love. Wow! I created life." It is an overwhelming feeling of joy and happiness.

A parent should look into the eyes of his baby for the first time and ask, "How could I have ever believed my life was complete before you arrived? Before this time, how could I have ever thought there was nothing else that could fit into my life or my schedule? How could I have ever believed that there was nothing left that could possibly lift my soul to such soaring heights?"

Usually, each time a baby is born and enters his parents' life, it is glorious. Within a few days, after you arrive home with your new baby, you begin to witness life evolving in ways you could never have imagined. As your baby is lying in the crib and starts to open its eyes, move around, and begin to recognize your voice over all other sounds, you really start trippin. "Look, look, look, my baby knows my voice!"

Then ever so gently, ever so slowly, you bend over and lift your child, cradling your new son or daughter in your arms, and positioning your baby so that you can look directly into each other's face and stare at each other, you say to yourself, "Oh, my goodness, look at you." The first time this happens with each new baby, it literally takes your breath away.

Over the next weeks, you find yourself constantly drawn to your baby to make sure he or she is still breathing as you look for the slow rising of the chest. Though your baby is tightly wrapped in a warm blanket, you listen for soft breathing sounds, you look for the slightest flutter of an eyelid or the slow curl of lips that are too small even to qualify as tiny. You instinctively, unconsciously, find yourself picking up your baby, cradling your precious child in your arms, and staring at him or her. You think to yourself, "How can life get any better than this?"

Those big, beautiful eyes are looking directly at you with a purpose that can convey only one thing. Love! And in that moment, you know beyond any shadow of a doubt, those eyes are penetrating deep into your soul. Your soul connection has been fused forever.

As you are looking into your baby's eyes, it's as if your baby is looking back at you saying, "I.SEE.YOU. I. LOVE.YOU." Then you repeat your sacred oath:

"My divine one, you will always have me to turn to. I will always love you. I will always be honest and faithful with you. I will treat our relationship with the highest integrity and respect.

I will never let you down. I will never leave you. I will never sacrifice you. I will never abandon you. I will never betray you. I will never surrender your trust. I will never turn my back on you. I will never relinquish my oath to protect you. I will always be your protector.

"I will always remind you on those days that you lose hope for whatever reason, I will always be your lighthouse and safe harbor. Even when we disagree, and all seems lost, I will always be your guardian, your loving Mother, your loving father. I will do everything to protect you from evil. If harm should ever come your way, even if it is I who am bringing the harm and causing the damage, I will without hesitation immediately remove you from harm, take responsibility for my action, and ensure that you are safe. I will protect you at all cost even if it means exchanging my life for yours. This is my sacred vow to you. This I promise."

– The Parent-Child Contract, Nick "Keeper" Catran-Whitney

Even today, when my children are in their 20's and 30's, our emotional Contract is still binding, still building in depth and strength, and it is impossible to break. The Parent-Child Contract is something I created for myself after my son was born. It is a code to remind me that, no matter what, I will not purposely put my children in harm's way. The very first time a parent experiences that moment of understanding with his baby, this emotionally binding Contract between two loving souls has just been signed, sealed, and delivered. It is a Contract that does not require pen be put to paper. This emotional agreement between a parent and child is love at its deepest. It's most genuine. It's most pure. It's most authentic.

As incredibly powerful as the emotion is for fathers, I can only imagine how intense it is for mothers. When my wife and I found out that she was pregnant with our first child, we were very happy. As happy as I was, when I saw the look on my wife's face, I knew the feeling was much

more intense than mine. Why? Because for her, the realization was not just that she was going to be a Mother, but the more powerful and overwhelming feeling was that there was going to be life growing inside of her. I could see millions of thoughts running through her mind as her tears flowed uncontrollably. Happy tears. Tears of joy. She just stared at that home pregnancy test stick, saying, "I'm pregnant. I'm going to be a Mother. Me! I'm going to be a Mom. I'm going to be a Mommy." Just like that, we were going to have a baby. As happy as I was, my joy didn't compare to hers. Her love had transcended to a new level right before my eyes. It easily eclipsed mine.

When I witnessed the proof of our pregnancy, I immediately knew what had just happened to me – I could feel it. However, instantly my wife evolved into a different person. I could see it on her face. Even though our only evidence was a thin blue line inside a white plastic stick with a window that said she was pregnant, she had changed forever. I saw something in her I had not seen in our previous four years of marriage. She immediately went into this kind of protective mode. Right before my very eyes, she became a mama bear ready to defend our unborn child at all costs. It was an amazing transformation.

Me, I carried around that plastic stick in my pocket for weeks. As far as I was concerned that was no thin blue line protected by a small clear plastic window. That blue line was my child, and I carried him everywhere. Even though that blue line wasn't growing inside me, it was proof for me, of my child growing and that plastic casing needed protecting.

As a man, as a father, as a husband, I can only imagine what it must be like for a Mother to know that this life inside her is entirely dependent on her to make the right decisions every moment. Each decision she makes has life-altering power for the baby. And the baby desperately depends on her to make good choices. Knowing every decision she makes holds her baby's life in

the balance, the Mother is fully aware of the intense, life-long bond created between them. Whether that bond remains special between the two of them, only time can tell – time and memories.

Over the years, I've tried to imagine at what point the emotional connection between Mother and baby truly locks in. Is it when the Mother finds out she is pregnant with a home pregnancy test? Is it when she goes to her doctor, and her doctor tells her, "Yep! You're pregnant?" What goes through her mind when she hears that confirmation? Is this when the bond takes hold and solidifies? Or does it happen when she hears the baby's heartbeat for the first time? Or is it during the ultrasound when the Mother sees the tiny human being inside her and the doctor says, "Look. Look right, there," pointing at the monitor with a pen. "That's your baby's heart pumping. Ahhhh, and look she is sucking her thumb, too. There's your baby! That's your little girl! Congratulations, you're a Mommy." At what point during the nine months of pregnancy does the Mother sign the Parent-Child Contract? The first trimester? The second trimester? The third trimester? During childbirth? When does she take the sacred oath: "You are my infant. You are my child. You came into this world, innocent and pure, trusting, and kind. You are my divine child, my little one, my baby.

"My divine newborn child, my love is your birthright. I am going to see to it that you are protected and cared for always. That is my commitment to you. That is my promise to you. That is what I am here for. This is the most important thing that I can do in my lifetime."

- Esther Robertson, Certified Weekend Leader for Woman Within International

Even though I was overwhelmed with the joy of knowing I was going to be a father, I knew I couldn't match my wife's emotional experience. Without a doubt, I had an enormous instant, very real emotional bond. But like my wife's? Like a woman's? Like an expectant Mother's? No way.

Yet for me, the moment I found out we were having a baby changed my life forever. I had a baby on the way. I was very happy. Then came the day of the first ultrasound. I thought I had been happy before. There on the monitor, I saw toes and fingers and a beating heart. Wow! That was our baby. There was our son! My son!

Up until the moment of the ultrasound image appearing on that small monitor, I could only live through my wife's sharing how she was feeling and changing physically and emotionally. This is what it's like for us guys. We're in the loop, but we aren't.

However, when I saw my son sucking his thumb in the ultrasound monitor and hearing the sound of that little tha-thump, tha-thump, tha-thump of his heartbeat coming through those speakers, my entire life changed in an instant. Ahhhh, man! That was the day it became so real. That was the moment I signed my Parent-Child Contract, my blood oath. I walked around with my ultrasound picture in my pocket for weeks showing anyone I could.

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To me, two of the most beautiful sounds in the world are the sounds of a puppy playing and listening to a two- or three-year-old child talking to his or her Mother or father. In my opinion, the absolute best time to listen to them talk is when I'm shopping in a grocery store. I'll be one aisle over when I'll hear a child's inquisitive voice asking a question or just laughing and then hearing the parent being so patient in answering all the child's questions in a warm, loving way.

In the past, you may not have given much thought to conversations between little children and their parents. But now, if you are like me, and you hear those exchanges between those tiny little voices and their parents', it could easily make you wonder, "What in the world could possibly make parents ever break such a powerful emotional Contract with their children? What could

possibly move a Mother or father to destroy such a special relationship? What mothers or fathers would ever think to betray their children?"

In many ways, it reminds me of being with my little sisters and brothers when we lived in Portland, Oregon. Being the second child of eight kids eight years apart, I helped my Mother change diapers and feed my two youngest brothers and three baby sisters. My Mother made sure I would position myself just right, so I wouldn't harm them. She taught me how to hold them in my arms as I fed them from a bottle or spoon-fed them baby food. She taught me how to hold their little heads, so they wouldn't flop up and down as I shifted their little bodies to get them in an upright feeding position. My Mom would say, "You're doing fine, Nicky. You won't hurt them. I'm here if you need help." When I held my little brothers and sisters, they would stare into my face with a look of wonder, a look that also said in their eyes, "I know I'm safe here with you and, oh yeah, I want that bottle now." It was pure heaven.

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Medical science says when a child is born, it only has two fears: the fear of falling and the fear of loud sounds. All other fears are learned. These additional fears are typically transferred to a child in one of two ways: through personal experience or someone's telling them what to fear and why. I take this one step further: all other fears children experience are imposed on them by external forces, whether they like it or not. Of all the fears that are forced on a child, the greatest are the ones forced on them when a supposedly loving, trusting parent takes that love and uses it against them. In my experience, children about three or four (and I am not a doctor in any way) tend to have a sense when something is being done to them that is not right. They have an innate ability to know something is out of place in their relationships with family and friends. So, when a parent molests them, they intuitively know it is not right.

There is no greater act of utter disgrace or cowardice than when parents sexually abuse their children. The only thing that begins to rival the molestation is another adult's covering it up. As disgusting and horrible as the initial act is, there are still three even worse acts, and they follow in predictable phases after the child realizes what happened to them was wrong, and then they begin to question their experience from their instinctive awareness of the Parent-Child Contract, and their parents' breaking of the blood oath. Evidence comes in three phases:

Phase One is Denial. The Denial Phase is when the sexually abusing parent denies that the abuse ever took place. This applies to both parents – the parent who perpetrated the assault and the parent who was aware of the abuse and did nothing to stop it – usually with lines like, “Oh no honey, nothing like that happened.” or, “What are you talking about? When? I–I don't remember anything like that.” When that no longer works, Phase Two kicks in.

Phase Two is “It's Your Fault.” That's when the parent tries to convince the child it was the child's fault that Mommy or daddy sexually abused them. Often it comes in the form of excuses like this: “You asked me to make you feel better. That's all that happened,” or “You shouldn't have been walking around like that. You looked so beautiful,” or “I'm your father. I know what's best for you,” and “Parents do this all the time. It's okay”. The sad part is that, even though the children are already emotionally damaged at this point, they are still looking to their parents, the ones who abused them, for advice or guidance. It is only when this tactic begins to break down that the third and final phase kicks in with a vengeance.

Phase Three is The Cover-Up. This is the “when-all-else-fails” strategy, the time when the guilty parent or parents must shut down the stories that may come out about the horrific acts in their home. Why do I say *parents*? It is usually between Phases One and Two that the other parent finds out what has been happening. She has either just found out or has known the whole

time and had done nothing to stop it. For whatever reason, the non-perpetrating parent is convinced that their lack of action is not only justified, it is necessary for the good of the child and the family. This lack of action makes them just as guilty as the parent who did the molesting. Remember the words, *“If harm should ever come your way, even if it is I who caused the harm, I will immediately, without hesitation, remove you from harm, take responsibility for my action, and ensure that you are safe. I will protect you at all costs, even if it means exchanging my life for yours.”* This is the time for the parent who did not do the molesting to respond as agreed in the Parent-Child Contract.

What kicked in during Phase Three – The Cover-Up Phase? What caused it to begin? Fear! Ego! Loss of the perpetrator’s image! Loss of respect the perpetrator never deserved in the first place – fear of being discovered for not being what the family have been portraying to other family and friends!

What sends Phase Three into overdrive? It is when the child who has been sexually molested begins to talk about the abuses. Until that moment, there is no need for the Cover-Up Phase. This phase only starts when the child starts to rebel and tell outside people what has secretly been taking place inside the walls of their home, peers or adults. This stage is the time when the betraying parent abandons the child or children they have been sexually abusing, to protect themselves from public ridicule and scrutiny. This phase is the ultimate act of love betrayed and abandonment of the Contract.

Once the child or children begin talking, what they believed to be their parents’ unconditional love is now visibly on display for them to see. They quickly realize that a parent who sexually molests them or allows it to happen is no longer showing unconditional love. Children understand that once the sexual molestations began, all that promised love had been abandoned for the parent or guardian’s sexual gratification.

The cover-up can only work if the abused child's public performance can persuade the public. The love is apportioned based on how well the child seems to submit publicly. Coming from a family of child entertainers like mine, we found acting was something we were usually good at. For my stepfather and Mother, it was a matter of applying the right amount of pressure - consisting of fear, intimidation, loss of potential fame and fortune, guilt, and shame - to us eight children at strategic times. If done right, this pressure could be reinforced over time, especially by using the emotional tools of loss, guilt, and shame to keep children controlled well into their adult years.

If my family is any example, and I believe it is, the sexual abuse that happened to us shows the betrayal doesn't occur impulsively. It happens organically. It happens over months and years before the first molestation even occurs. It is a slow, systematic, methodical process. For us, it was a process that started long before the first physical act of betrayal happened. This insidious act takes time. It takes proper planning.