

Lisa¹ is a happy, active thirteen-year-old. She participates in many normal youthful pursuits such as church youth group, stage productions, swimming, art, softball, gymnastics, and most notably, ballet. Lisa is passionate about dancing, and wishes her mother could afford more than the four lessons a week she attends now. And, Lisa has been happily home-schooled by her mother for the past nine and one-half years. Until now.

In what could be a landmark case that has raised the hackles of the home schooling community in Colorado, a court has overruled Lisa's mother's parental rights pertaining to the education of her daughter. At the request of Lisa's non-custodial father, a Jefferson County Magistrate has recently ordered Lisa's mother, Shelly, to enroll her in public school. Since Shelly has not complied and has appealed this ruling, she is facing contempt of court charges, instituted by the father.

Magistrate Marilyn Leonard has been overheard saying that she is against home schooling, stating that it is unhealthy, that it deprives children of socialization, and that a parent isn't capable of teaching high-school aged children. She also ruled, at the father's request, that Lisa's extracurricular activities cannot be scheduled during her father's visits.

Because Lisa's visits with her father, Michael, occur on the weekends, she is unable to participate in activities that are scheduled during those visits, such as ski trips, unless he is willing to forgo his parenting time for that activity. According to the court records, this has been a source of contention for Michael who does not want anything to infringe on his parenting time, and a source of disappointment for Lisa, because she has not been allowed to participate.

Lisa wrote a letter to the supervising Judge R. Brooks Jackson. She addresses the court's ruling about scheduling her activities during Michael's visitations. Some of her ballet classes and rehearsals occur during this time. "[My dad] promised to let me do as much ballet as a growing dancer needs. So far we have had nothing but complications concerning ballet. . . I don't believe my dad is crazy about dancing, so he doesn't totally support it. This is my life, and I am totally devoted to it. . . I am embarking on some new and very exciting things in ballet. . . [these] are very important in a young dancer's life, giving me experience and strength.

[Dad] told me that if he had his summer vacation during the Vail Ballet Summer School, 'too bad.' I couldn't do it, even if I did get chosen. That is just not fair. I feel this is ruining my life, not allowing me to do what I love and fulfill my dream."

I tried to interview Lisa's father, Michael, who is a Jefferson County deputy sheriff. He refused to discuss the case. I can't help but wonder what kind of father would act so heartlessly selfish against his daughter? Whatever his intent is in making these

¹Not her real name

requests of the court, Lisa is suffering as a result.

Lisa's letter to the judge says "I write this letter to you, to tell you of the feelings of a thirteen year old girl that your decisions will effect (sic) drastically, determining whether I will thrive as the healthy, active and very joyous girl that I am or whether my life will be turned upside down."

Lisa enjoys being home-schooled very much and says, ". . . it makes it a lot easier to achieve the goals in my life . . ." She doesn't want to go to public school because, ". . . you don't have very much one-on-one time and usually the grades of children that attend are average or not too good. Mine are higher. . .I want to go at a pace that enables me to learn at my own timing and even graduate early so I can pursue my life goals."

Lisa loves her father. And her mother. And she loves ballet. And she loves being home schooled.

Come on, Dad, grow up. You look pretty selfish from where I'm sitting. You're making your little girl chose between the activities she loves and the father she loves. Even if you win, you lose.

Love doesn't demand a choice. A loving parent nourishes the independent dreams of their children to the best of their ability.

If you love her, support her dreams. Do everything in your power to encourage her success. If you can afford it, volunteer to pay for the extra ballet classes she wants. Ungrudgingly let her attend dance during your parenting time. Withdraw your request to put her into public school. You'll be her hero and she'll love you for it for the rest of her life.

You only have a few years left before she is a woman, before it's too late for anything but regrets. What you do now will probably shape your relationship with your daughter for all time.

I was once a thirteen year-old girl with a dream. Trust me.