

BATON ROUGE

PARENTS[®]

JANUARY 2015

BATON ROUGE FAMILIES LIVE BY

Modern Slavery

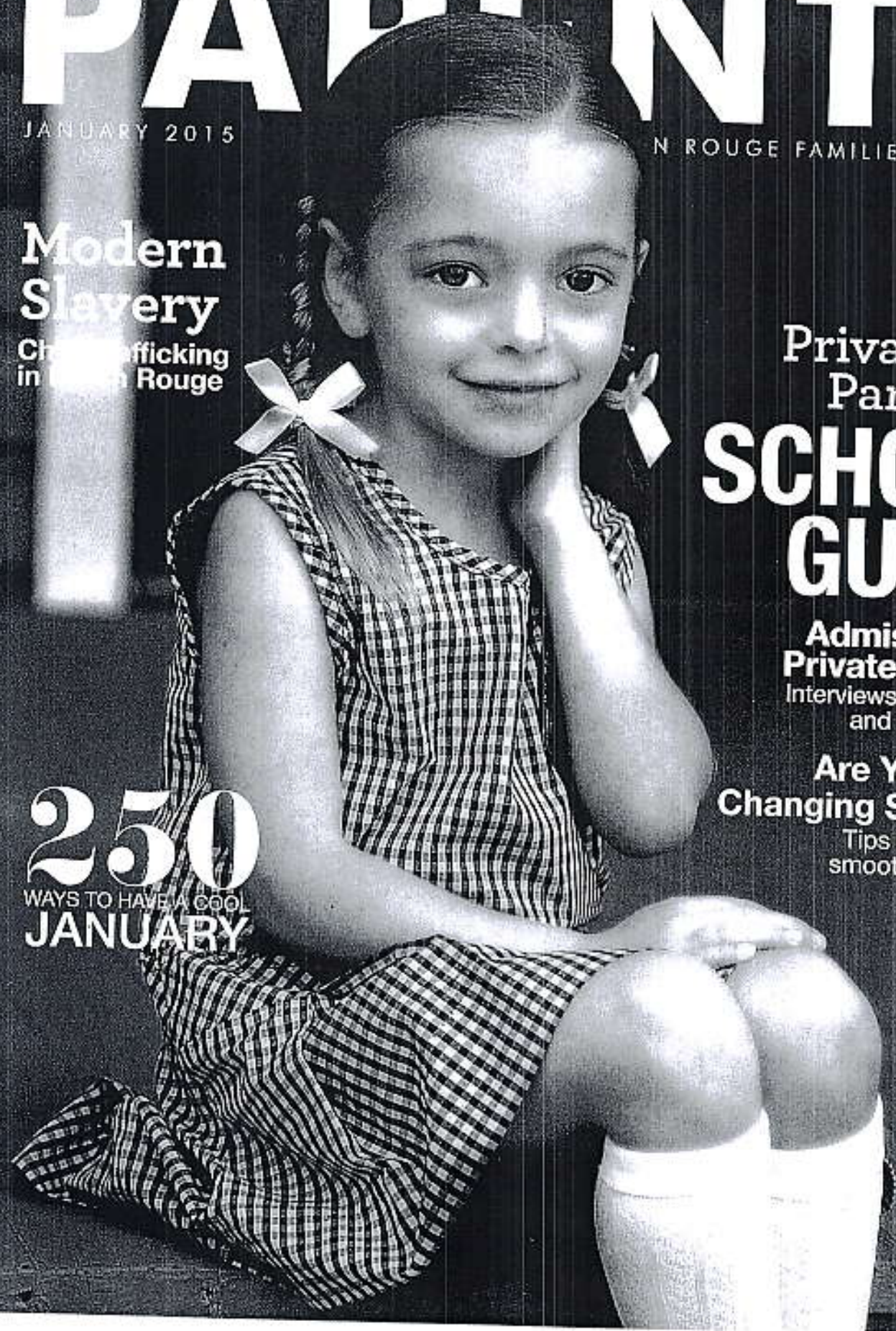
Child Trafficking in Baton Rouge

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JANUARY

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PARENTAL ALIENATION: When our Children are Forced to Choose

By Lauren Labbé Mehar
2014 Cover Kid, Abigail W.

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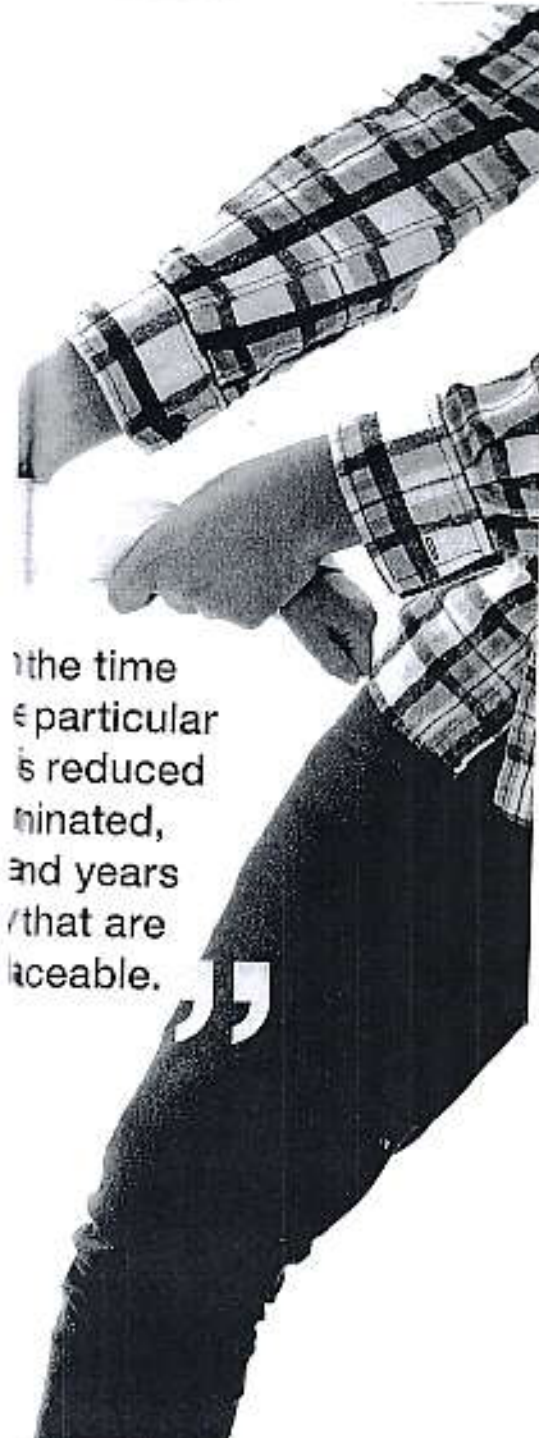
The U.S. Census Bureau reported that in 2009, there were 2,077,000 divorces obtained in North America, including the parents of more than one million children under the age of 18. So chances are either you, or several people you know, have been impacted by divorce. Most divorced parents put a lot of thought into how this life change will affect their children. Most parents know to put their child's well-being and needs before their own. Most parents are aware of the daily efforts that co-parenting requires, to set aside their negative feelings and maintain a positive relationship with their former spouse for the sake

of the children. Most parents know that although their house may be different, it is still a home, and although their family portrait may not look the same, they are still a family. But what if someone knows all of this, and either wittingly or unwittingly tries to completely erase a family member from the family picture?

Parental alienation is a social dynamic where a child expresses unjustified hatred, or an unreasonably strong dislike of one parent, making access to the child either difficult or impossible for the alienated parent. Although it might seem uncommon, a 12-year study commissioned by the

Family Law Section of the American Bar Association found, "In over 1,000 divorces studied, that 'parental alienation,' the programming of a child against the other parent, occurs regularly, 60 percent of the time, and sporadically another 20 percent."

According to one of Baton Rouge's Father's Rights Attorneys, Norma Beedle, parental alienation most typically occurs after divorce, when a primary domiciliary parent who controls the child's environment and time communicates negative messages in regard to the other parent. Beedle adds that these negative messages can be conveyed directly, through the primary par-



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ent's words, or indirectly through his or her body language.

Linda J. Gottlieb, LMFT, LCSW-R, and renowned author on parent alienation, says sometimes alienation even occurs while the marriage is still intact. "When families seek therapy, it is often when there is a disengagement between the couple and an enmeshment between one parent and the children." While these cases are much less severe, and while at first these messages may be unintentional, they often quickly escalate when the couple separates. This ultimately leads to the scapegoating of the targeted parent with the goal being to sever

the relationship between targeted parents and children.

What are the signs of parental alienation?

Some clues from both the child and the primary parent that parental alienation is occurring are as follows: a child acts uncharacteristically rude or belligerent to an alienated parent, a child takes the side of their primary parent, or a child refuses to go with his or her alienated parent; a primary parent asks a child to choose between parents, a parent provides limited to no information on a child's academics, extracurricular activities and medical issues, or refuses to give the other parent access to records on these issues.

What are the short-term effects?

The short-term impact of parental alienation on a child can be seen almost instantaneously with the progression of his or her belief that the other parent is worthless, selfish, unloving, or even dangerous. The children become convinced that their lives will be better and happier without the alienated parent. Beedle emphasizes, "When the time with one particular parent is reduced or eliminated, days and years go by that are irreplaceable. A child will only be six years old, and do six-year-old things once—and this valuable time can never be gotten back." As the alienation escalates, the children may begin to feel guilty and blame themselves for family problems, which can become lifelong as the cycle continues.

What are the long-term effects?

Children who have experienced parental alienation will present a variety of lifelong effects including depression, failed relationships, multiple divorces, and alienation from their own children one day.

What should an alienated parent do?

The first step any alienated parent should take is to reach out to a parent co-

ordinator or mediator who can discuss disputes and custody plans without involving courts. Parents may also seek the help of a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, or someone who has experience with families dealing with divorce or marital issues.

Should a parent need further help, Beedle recommends securing an attorney, who can help file a petition to modify custody so that the parents can get equal standing with both the environment and time with their child. An attorney can also help modify the judgment to name the alienated parent the domiciliary parent, and seek a psychological or custody evaluation of the primary parent. It is difficult to prove that the initial parent is promoting the alienation of the other since much negativity is conveyed through tone and subtle actions. In the most severe cases, a child psychiatrist is recommended.

What should a primary parent do?

Because the primary parent is also often dealing with unaddressed emotional issues, he or she may not even realize that these behaviors are happening. Once the issues are brought to the forefront, parenting classes and counseling for the alienator can be a tremendous help in dealing with feelings of resentment and other issues. The alienating parent should also seek help from a professional counselor or who works with divorcing parents or those with marital issues.

How can others help?

As a community, people can help each other by understanding the impact of parental alienation and learning to recognize the signs. The more everyone knows to shed light on this overlooked topic, the easier it will be for families of divorce to manage their transition to a new life, and a new family portrait, where although family lines may be blurred and changed, both parents remain in the picture. ■

Resources:
www.endparentalalienation.com
www.fathersrightsawfirm.com