

Cases to Examine: Changing Roles



Examine the following cases and answer the questions that follow each.

Case 1

Sarah and her husband, Phil, and their daughters, ten and twelve years of age, live in Tampa, Florida. Phil teaches biology at a local public high school, coaches cross-country running and track, and greatly enjoys the outdoor activities that living by the sea allows him.

Sarah has recently finished law school. Phil was very supportive of her schooling because he knew that Sarah had always dreamed of being a lawyer just like her father. In fact, Sarah did so well in law school that several firms have offered her a position. One of the firms is based in Tampa. If she works for that firm, her pay will be good, but she knows that her position there would be a dead end. She would be comfortable but not doing all that she is capable of.

The offer that is most tempting is from a firm that has an office in Washington, D.C., as well as in Tampa. This firm wants her to transfer to the Washington office. The pay is better, but more important, she will have a better opportunity to expand her professional horizons. This firm has taken cases to the U.S. Supreme Court, and its lawyers have written for the best law journals. Sarah sits down with Phil to discuss what they should do.

- What are some of the issues involved for Sarah?

- What are some of the issues involved for Phil?

- What are some of the issues involved for the whole family?



Case 2

Rudolfo works as a mechanic for one of the major airlines. One Friday he comes home to find his wife, Rita, packing her bags into the trunk of her company car. Mystified and fearful, he asks her what is happening. She replies that she needs more space to be herself because they got married too young.

After Rita drives off, Rudolfo enters the house to find their two boys, ages three and five, in tears. He hugs them and soon they stop crying. As usual, he straightens up the house and begins supper. He has learned to be a decent cook because his wife's sales job has frequently prevented her from being home in time to cook dinner. Her job pays more than his, so he has not balked at doing the cooking and most of the cleaning.

Still stunned, Rudolfo wonders what is going to happen to his family. After eating and doing the dishes, he watches television with the boys, both snuggled under his arms. At bedtime he helps them into their pajamas and talks to them as he has done every night since they were born. Then he walks to his room. The full weight of his wife's leaving hits him.

Five weeks later, Rudolfo still hurts from his wife's leaving, but he has adapted his schedule so that he can take care of the boys. However, he has just received notice that his wife is seeking custody of the children. He desperately wants to keep them, despite the cautions of many people who say that children should be with their mother.

- Do you agree that children are generally better off with their mother?

- What might be some effects on the children if they are allowed to stay with Rudolfo?

- After Rita left, what adjustments did Rudolfo probably have to make in order to care for the boys alone?

- How could being a single parent be an enriching experience for Rudolfo?
