



C A L I F O R N I A  
C h i l d A b d u c t i o n  
T A S K F O R C E

## A Victim Speaks

By **Cecile Finkelstein** (name used with permission)

There are no winners when it comes to parental abduction. Everyone loses, especially the children. I was abducted by my father when I was 4 years old, and was missing for 14 years. I lived those years on the run, in hiding, and in fear. We lived on Greyhound buses and traveled through 3 countries and 34 states, all to run away from a mother who loved me. I had to dress like a boy, dye my hair different colors, beg for money and food, change my name and identity many times. I didn't go to school much, or live in one place for very long, and was exposed to inappropriate and dangerous situations. It was a life of fear and homelessness.

As a very young child, I believed that my father did what he did because he loved me. He told me that the reason my mother wasn't with us was because she didn't care about me and was a bad person. Since I was so young, I quickly began to forget her face, her voice, everything. She soon became a faceless stranger who wanted to take me away from all that had become familiar. I helped my father hide me, and saw him as my hero. I, like most children, preferred the familiar to the unfamiliar, even if the familiar was abusive and awful.

It was only as I grew older that I began to see things differently. From things that my father said and did, I began to realize that his reasons for abducting me had nothing to do with my well-being. An aunt of mine, my father's sister, told me that she thought my father was wrong to do what he did. She told me that my mom was a loving, responsible parent who wanted the best for me, and wanted me to have a good relationship with my dad, and that prior to the abduction I had spent nearly as much time with him as with her. My aunt said that my mother had come to her house crying, begging her to just let her know if I was alive and okay. This really touched me.

Another thing that made me rethink the abduction was that my father has abducted other children before, two of his three sons—my half-brothers—from his first marriage. (My mother was his second wife, and she didn't know that he had abducted the boys. He was granted custody of them by a European court, using forged documents stating that their American mother didn't want custody of them.) It seemed to be the way he dealt with his frustrations, and made me think that maybe what he did had less to do with protecting me than I was led to believe it did. As a teenager I nearly destroyed myself, both emotionally and physically. I felt betrayed by those who were supposed to love and protect me, and my world fell apart.

I managed to find my mother when I was nearly 18. It was a difficult reunion, since part of me desperately wanted to hang on to the belief that what my father did was justified. It was almost too painful to believe otherwise. But I wanted the truth. I called my mother before my 18th birthday, and we met shortly after. The pain didn't end with my meeting my mom, a wonderful person. (I tried hard to find the fatal flaws that would have justified my father's actions but they aren't there. She's wonderful.) I had to figure out who I was, where I came from, and where I was going. It took many years to reestablish a relationship with my mother, come to terms with my past, and learn to trust myself, others, and my perceptions of the world.

A support group, The Link, has been formed as an informal network for people who have experienced abduction, with a special focus on life after abduction. For a copy of the Link's newsletter, email: [Saracecili@yahoo.com](mailto:Saracecili@yahoo.com)  
The link's website is <http://www.thekidslink.org/>