

“Echoes of the Heart”
Reflections on Life and Community Living
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Divorce: from the child’s point of view. Typically, in our culture, conversations on divorce have been shaped from the point of view of the parents. With the recent appearance of Elizabeth Marquardt’s book, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce*, a voice for the children is sounded. What a breath of fresh air!

In our *immediate gratification* culture where, too easily, we’re massaged into thinking our lives are about us—our happiness, our success, our entitlement—the harsh realities of divorce are too often summarily dismissed.

Seldom do we hear much of the suffering of *children of divorce*. But think about it! To begin with, the child is left with two worlds (the world of mom and the world of dad) to reconcile and make sense of. The usual tension and conflict of bringing two worlds together in marriage—normally handled by the parents—is passed on from the adults to the child.

What an enormous burden; and often at too early an age. And as Marquardt reminds us, it only gets worse as the years pass and *the divorced parents develop new relationships, new jobs and new interests*.

Truth-telling about divorce. Marquardt is a graduate of the University of Chicago Divinity School and is currently an *affiliate scholar* at the Institute for Family Values. Her book is the result of a survey of 1,500 young adults enabling her to make comparisons between children of divorce and children of *in tact* families.

One of her findings—which doesn’t surprise us, but at the same time gets our attention—is that, from the child’s point of view, there is no such thing as a *good divorce*. Even in the most amicable of divorces, divorce indelibly marks children.

Always, there is a sadness that lurks beneath the success of even the most highly functioning children of parents who divorced.

As a culture and as family persons, that’s an alarming reality.

All the time, we hear of couples opting to *stay together for the children*. What this book suggests is that merely *staying together* is not enough (often times, these same couples divorce after the children leave home). What children need (what the family needs) is for parents to *work at the marriage*.

Marriage is hard work. Although there are always exceptions, still, most marriages *can* be renewed and reinvigorated. Most adults *can* grow and evolve. We *can* let go of baggage and *stuff* that might otherwise lead us into divorce court.

Once we bring children into the world, our lives are no longer *just about us*. They're about our families.

In our contemporary world of celebrity romance and *reality TV*, where marriage is oft-times idealized into some magical kingdom of entitlement and eternal bliss, we can easily forget (or not be reminded) that marriage is never perfect. It asks much of both partners. Always, there are weak spots and hard times to work through.

However, when children come along, the core values of *responsibility* and *sacrificial love* (core values for Christians and Jews) are expected of all parents. It's what marriage asks of us, and what our society needs from us. It's how our families survive and give vitality and substance to our culture.

Put another way, *life is supposed to be hard*. That's what makes it meaningful and worthwhile. It's what gives us the feelings and the pathos to compose poems and sing from our hearts about freedom and joy.

As a culture, we need to expect more from one another in both our marriages and our families. We need to raise the bar.

Always, love impels us to *see the big picture of our lives*. In the *big picture*, our lives are about more than merely *us* as individuals. They're about *us* as families and communities. They're about *us* as nation and international community.

O what a day!