

A tragic story of a young boy and his younger sister trapped by their abusive and vindictive mother with the help and assistance of the corrupt courts and unethical legal professionals. Terrified, they are unable to escape to be with their loving father.



Among millions of voices on the net, Arthur's rings out

Reprint of Article in the Los Angeles Times
By Robert A. Jones



Now comes Arthur, 11 years of age, with a message for the rest of us. Everyone who's seen his message feels its sorrow and mystery. Arthur seems to be suggesting that the world doesn't work very well for 11-year-olds and he wants to try something new. But who is Arthur, really, and why is he telling us these things?

Arthur first appeared this summer through his home page on the World Wide Web. As you may know, a home page is an announcement of selfhood on the Internet. It says, "Here I am." By one estimate, the Net contains roughly 4 million home pages, meaning any one page can easily get lost.

Arthur's did not. It bears the title, "Arthur's Child Abuse Homepage" and it begins like this: "My name is Arthur. I'm 11 years old. My sister, Megan, who is 9, and I are abused by our mother and our 19-year-old half brother. I live in San Diego, California, and the courts here won't help us. My sister and I have decided we won't take it anymore. We can't stand up to our mother directly or she'll punish us so the Internet is one way we'll fight back. Sooner or later we'll find a way to be safe again." Arthur describes his mother as having "bad moods" during which she "hits us and throws things at us or knocks us down and screams at us. She sometimes throws dishes and silverware or even furniture. She throws apples sometimes. Megan hides under the bed and I try to run away."

The hitting and knocking down have kept up for four years, Arthur says, ever since his mother and father were divorced and began battling over custody. He says he and Megan have a court-appointed attorney who is supposed to take care of them but doesn't. "I called CPS [Child Protective Services] a couple of times but they won't do anything because [our attorney] tells them she is taking care of it. Our attorney is a liar."

It goes on, but you catch the drift. Arthur says he wants to go and live with his dad but the courts won't let him because his mother has majority custody. He says he asked the judge to fire the

court-appointed attorney but the judge refuses. This summer, things got so bad that he started talking about killing himself and Arthur says his father took him to a hospital for observation.

The home page finally arrives at the point of the exercise. "If you're a kid who is going through the same kind of thing or just if you have some ideas," Arthur writes, "I've put a link here so you can get in touch with me." Then he asks simply, "Do you want to talk to me?"

The home page contains a picture of Arthur, smiling, along with a copy of a document from his hospital visit that reads, "Suspected Child Abuse Report." The name Martin Greenberg, M.D., is scrawled on the top line.

And there sits the home page today, raising all kinds of questions. Does Arthur exist? If so, is he speaking his own mind or his father's? And if Arthur is everything he seems to be, will his leap onto the Internet help him or hurt him?

Being a journalist of the old-fashioned type, I can answer some of these questions. But others I cannot. I can tell you, for example, that Arthur does exist. At his dad's house, over the telephone, Arthur says he wrote the home page himself with only some technical assistance from his father. When asked again if he wrote it in his own words, he replies, "Well, you have to use a language called hypertext markup language." It's the same voice used by every kid who ever guided an adult through the programming of a VCR.

Arthur is less certain when asked what his mom might do when she sees the home page. He thinks about the question and says, "I don't know." Is he scared of what might happen? "Yeah," he says. Still, Arthur says he decided to take the risk because it just might get him some help.

"Lots of people would see it," he says, maybe even someone who could talk to the authorities in San Diego.

As of yet, no one has risen out of the ether to rescue Arthur from his misery. But the home page has created a minor frenzy on the Internet, especially among fathers rights groups, and many have written to offer their solace. More important, it has lifted Arthur's case out of the shadows and into the light, performing the same cultural magic once offered only by newspapers and television.

Meanwhile, the adversaries named on the

home page say that it represents a misleading picture of Arthur's family life. Carol Cavanaugh, his mom's attorney, contends that the real misery, in fact, stems more from Arthur's father than his mother. The complaints of abuse, she says, are groundless and are fed to Arthur by the father. She maintains that Arthur himself would tell a very different story if he were contacted in the presence of his mother.

If so, we won't have a chance to find out. As The Times continued the make inquires about the home page, the Family Court in San Diego moved to silence Arthur. Last Wednesday, the court ordered both sides in the custody case to stop Arthur from talking further with The Times. Who asked for such an order? Turns out that person is one Lee Lawless, the court-appointed attorney that Arthur wants fired. The order is temporary until a hearing on a permanent order can be held.

What is the perceived harm in letting Arthur speak for himself? We don't know because Lawless declines to explain her action. Here's what we see: The very people criticized in the home page have drawn a curtain around him. They have moved to push his case back into shadows. Arthur has been muffled.

At least, muffled in terms of the old technology of newspapers. The Family Law Court apparently does not yet understand the ways of the World Wide Web and its order does not mention the Internet. It would seem, if he so wishes, that Arthur can tell his story on his home page.

And maybe he will. We should keep in mind that no one outside Arthur's family really understands its troubles. No one knows where Arthur's problems truly lie. But everyone can understand a troubled kid asking for help. And no one can help but admire a kid who will try to get that help any way he can.

If you want to check, Arthur's home page address is <http://www.artmeg.com>. Surf the Web tonight.

Descriptors:
INTERNET (COMPUTER NETWORK); CHILD ABUSE;