

REVIEW of Ellen Bruno's DVD, "SPLIT: Divorce Through Kids' Eyes"

By Don Saposnek

Having designed, developed, and delivered one of the first Divorce Education courses in California back in the 1980s, I reviewed most of the videos regarding children and divorce that were produced soon thereafter. These were videos shown in divorce education classes throughout the California family court system when such classes became mandatory, and eventually in family courts across the country.

The early ones were crude, amateurish, low-budget videos that utilized local mediation staff members as actors—bad actors, mostly. However, they did manage to get the necessary content across; ongoing parental conflict is bad for children; parents need to communicate effectively; children need to be kept out of the middle; children need to be told it is not their fault that their parents divorced, etc. After a while, the newer videos showing divorce professionals lecturing about these important points were interspersed with scenes of real children speaking about the effects of their parents' divorce on them. These videos stepped the game up to the next level—real children expressing their real feelings. However, the cinematography in those videos was still rather rough and unrefined—mostly talking heads, with annoying background music.

Enter Ellen Bruno's new film, *Split*. This documentary, funded partially by our very own Academy of Professional Family Mediators, is the next level for understanding the effects of divorce on children. The movie is 28 minutes long and consists 100% of interviews of real children (no adults were ~~harmful~~ used in the making of this film!) telling about their experiences going through their parents' divorces. The movie is subtly divided into sections, titled *Families, Change, What Happened, Wishing, Moving On, Back and Forth, Two Homes, What Helps, Talking About it*, and *Life Goes On*. In each section, the children

focus their talk around those respective topics, giving the movie a smooth continuity and flow through the divorce experience, from the children's early pain, sadness and anger, through what helped them along their way, to seeing a more positive future ahead.

Not only are the children's stories compelling and accurate, as any of us who work with children in divorce know all too well, they are replete with innocent humor and charm—the raw stuff of honest children expressing their feelings and observations. One particular example that struck me was a little girl describing the loss of her father in her life: "I miss having a father in the house—But—we do have a man in the house—But—he's not really a person—he's an animal—he's my rat—Don't worry, he's alright—he doesn't bite!" And, in another scene, a girl describes how she has coped with the divorce, "I just let go a little bit of tears."

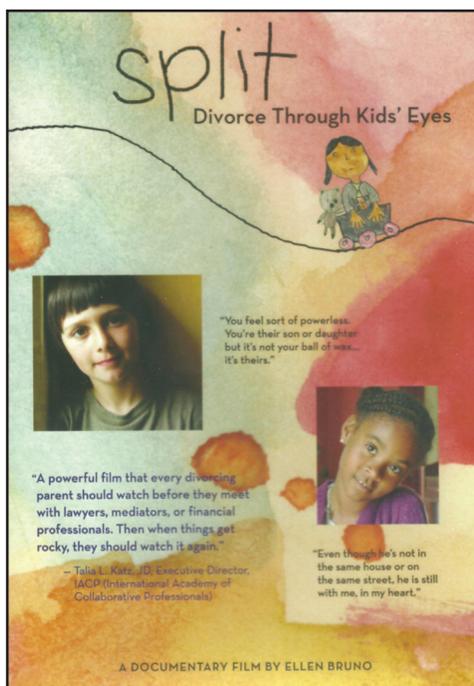
The cinematographic in this film is beautiful. In between the wonderful close-ups of the children talking, actual color drawings made by the children featured in the movie are exquisitely turned into animated graphics that slowly float and move across the screen, symbolically matching and overlaying the verbal content of the particular scenes. The colors are aesthetically extraordinary, the symbolism right on message, and the deli-

cate musical score seamlessly enhances the story, on a subconscious level.

"Split" has great power to influence parents and divorce professionals alike to do divorce better. There is no more poignant way to make the points of how we need to protect children in divorce than seeing and hearing directly from the children, and in such an artistic and elegant way. I can see this film being used in family courts across the country as an orientation video for separating and divorcing parents prior to beginning mediation, and as an orientation to the reality

of divorce for judges taking on a family law calendar, and in law schools' family law classes. I can also see it being shown by private practice mediators to clients as an orientation prior to mediating, and to groups of children going through divorce, as it would offer sound acknowledgement of and support for their most difficult feelings. I would strongly encourage you to view this lovely film and discover even more ways to integrate it into your work of sup-

porting families going through divorce. To order the DVD, go to: www.split-film.org



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