

Custody Battle

Delanae Sykes

Earlier this year, my boys' father tried to get sole custody of my kids. I believe that if a mother is a good mother then there is no reason for the kids to be taken away. I love my kids and would never put them in harm's way. I needed to get my two boys back right away. I had to speak up!

I have had my two boys since birth, and I don't know what I would do without them. Their father went behind my back and got temporary custody. I was infuriated because he had just been released from jail for non-payment of child support. My next step was to go to court and prove that I am a good mother and care for my kids properly.

When the boy's father and I arrived at the Court House, we had to sit with a mediator and tell him our history from the time we met until the time the father got temporary custody. I explained my situation to the mediator: I had the boys enrolled in school; I brought the boys to the doctor on a regular basis; I had made a safe living situation for us. I then gave him phone numbers to call so he could confirm what I told him.

In addition to these facts, it was important for the mediator to know the reasons why I felt the boys' father was unfit and unable to care for our children. I explained that I had given their father many chances to have the boys. Every time he had them for an extended visit, he would call me and tell me he couldn't care for them anymore. I would then have to go pick them up and move them back with me.

We then went in front of the judge. After reviewing what the mediator wrote, he granted me sole physical custody of my boys. It was the most stressful day of my life, but I also felt tremendous relief. It felt good to know I had stood up in front of the judge and told him what I thought. I realized that, if necessary, I could tell people how I felt and stand up for what I believed was right.



Delanae Sykes is a GED student at the Portsmouth Basic Adult Education Program in Portsmouth, NH. She is a 25-year-old single mother of three beautiful children. Her main goal in life is to be able to provide her children with all the things they need.

Take it Further

After reading "Custody Battle" and "Justice of My Own" (on the next page), refer back to the "Three Types of Civic Participation" chart on page 4. What kind of participation do Delanae Sykes and Felicia Taylor describe in these two articles? Are there ways that their problems could be addressed using *all three* types of participation? Divide into groups. Pick one of the articles and generate ideas about how a person could respond to the situation using *all three* types of participation. Get back together and share your ideas. Think about how they relate to your own "battles."