



Custody Battle

How I Found My Voice

Samantha Paquette

BEFORE YOU READ: What is a custody battle? Share what you know. What does the gavel in the picture on the right represent? Read the caption to learn more about child custody.

Diving into the Unknown

In the summer of 2015, my son was three years old, and I was 22. I was trying to co-parent with my ex, but it was difficult. I often saw on social media that he was not with our son when he was supposed to be. My ex would leave our son with his parents. Since my ex did not spend time with our child, I decided I would not send him to visit as often. My ex was not happy about this. He likes to be able to control every situation.

In September 2015, my ex came with the police to remove our son from my custody. The police served me with a 30-day emergency custody order. There was nothing I could do until the court date. I was completely devastated. From the day he was born, I had

never gone more than a few days without our son. None of the information on the custody order was true. My ex fabricated all the reasons why the court should give him emergency custody.

During those 30 days, I was a mess. I was scared and confused. How could this happen without any evidence? Meanwhile, my husband filed for full custody of our son. He told lies about me. He tried to make me look like an unfit parent. I was afraid that the system would fail my family. I was afraid the judge would believe these lies. I felt incredibly small. With a heavy heart, I dove head-first into the unknown of the family court system. I felt crazy with fear, but I learned that



Custody means to have control over or supervision of something or someone. If you have custody of a child, you make decisions and are responsible for the child. If the child's parents divorce, a judge in family court may determine how custody will be divided between the parents. Image from: pix4free.org.

sometimes when we face our fears, we find our voice.

I Had No Money for a Lawyer

At the beginning of the custody battle, I thought I was going to fail my son. At the time, I had little faith in the family court process. I had never even collected child support, due to my lack of faith in the process.

I didn't have a lawyer, and I wasn't financially stable. It was so stressful that I wanted to give up and just let his father win. His father had a lawyer, so I thought he had the upper hand. But I changed my mind when I realized, "I am the mom, and my voice matters; my views

matter." No one knows my son like I do. I know his favorite color, his favorite shows and songs, and his best school subjects. I know how to make him feel better when he's sick, and so much more.

Those are things that could not be taken away from me. They are things that could not be faked. With a new inner confidence, I decided I would

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go to every court date and fight for my right to custody. I knew that being his mom would give me the power I needed. You cannot argue with my status as “Mom,” no matter what my bank statements says. My voice was strong, even though it shook with fear.

I Found My Voice

After gaining that self-confidence, I began to advocate for me and my son. Who makes the school plans for my son? Me. Who remembers his doctor appointments? Me. Who has the ability to talk in a genuine way about him, without it sounding like a pre-written statement? Me. I have that power. The judge saw me and heard me because I gave her something to see and hear!

Remember: no matter where you come from or who you are, you can fight for your children. Showing up and standing up for yourself is the first step. When the storm passes, you will see how amazing it can be to just believe in yourself.

Still Growing

Now it’s 2023 and I still make our son’s doctor appointments, I get him ready for school every

day, and I put him to sleep every night. I still co-parent with my ex, even though he is so difficult. It is in our son’s best interest is to have both parents in his life.

The whole experience has made me who I am today. I wrote this story so other parents who are going through the same thing will feel less alone.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Tell Samantha’s story in your own words. Use sequencing words like *first*, *then*, and *later*.
2. Even though Samantha is afraid, she gets the courage to communicate with the judge. How does she do it? Share a time you communicated about something despite being afraid. How did you do it?

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Samantha Paquette is a GED student at Westbay Adult Education in Warwick, Rhode Island. She still has her son and is also them mom of two other children. Being a writer has always been a passion of hers. She wants to go to college for a business degree because she has dreams of opening her own coffee shop. She hopes this story helps other parents involved in custody cases to fight and not give up.



Advice from a Gray Panther

“Stand before the people you fear and speak your mind – even if your voice shakes.”

– Maggie Kuhn

Maggie Kuhn was a founding member of the Gray Panthers. Look her up online and find out more about her. Research the Gray Panthers and share what you learn with your classmates.