

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

Violence begets violence

On January 13th the headline of this column was "A father's sacrifice," with my wondering if indeed Elian Gonzalez' father knew beforehand of the attempted escape of his ex-wife and little boy from Cuba to the United States. I wondered if the father might be glad his son had reached our shores and believed that maybe Elian should live in freedom in this country.

Boy, have I changed my mind. Since then we have seen Elian's two grandmothers travel to a foreign and confusing country

to fight for their grandson. We have seen photo after photo of the father, Juan Gonzalez, obviously grief-stricken and unaware of the plans made for his son to be taken to another country. We have learned that the great uncle, whom Elian had not met before, has had four DUI's, lost his drivers license and is not employed and another uncle living with them had three DUI's. Folks, for lots of reasons, this does not appear to be a stable group.

We are aware of the Miami relatives trying

to turn Elian against his father because he lives in Cuba. We've all seen the heart-wrenching video taken of Elian saying he doesn't want go back to Cuba with his father, while really too young to know what he's saying or doing. Both the Miami relatives and Fidel Castro have made Elian a political pawn, and as far as I'm concerned, the the Miami relatives made his life a nightmare.

We've seen this little boy's life turned topsy-turvy with mobs of people and the media in front of his house day and night, demonstrating, yelling, such a carnival atmosphere that he finally had to be removed from school. This is freedom? Our government, in the form of Attorney General Janet Reno, the Immigration Services and President Clinton has remained consistent from the beginning — that top priority should be given to reuniting father and son — and most of America agrees with that position, in spite of all the political crap that is practically choking us to death.

I'm impressed with the poise and intelligence of the father, Juan Miguel, whom we know has read some prepared statements, but in a television interview spoke extemporaneously and effectively.

I was convinced the Miami relatives were not acting in good faith when they finally received the order from the Attorney General and Federal Court to turn the child over to his father. After way too many compromises had been made for them already, they thumbed their collective noses at our courts and laws and government and proceeded to break the law. Even Elian's family in Miami disagreed about what should be done, with some cousins supporting the position of the INS and Reno — that Elian should be returned to his

father.

It should come as no surprise that the INS had to resort to a quick and effective method of getting Elian out of the home of his Miami relatives. A spokesman for the Miami family said the day of the rescue that until a few days before, there had been guns in the home. There were constant threats from the mobs outside of what they would do if anyone tried to take the boy. It's no wonder then, that when the officials arrived, they were ready for anything.

The Miami family kept changing the rules and conditions until most of the nation was practically screaming for Janet Reno to do something. Well, she did. When I woke up Saturday morning and heard Elian was on his way to be with his father, I cheered. Of course the photo shown 'round the world is awful, but can those three minutes be any worse than hanging onto an inner tube in the Atlantic ocean for several days? Can it be any worse than the constant noise and hysteria going on around him for five months? Can they be any worse than watching your mother die? Elian can surely thank his Miami family for that three minutes of terror.

I anxiously watched television as the obsessed uncle and cousin tried to get into Andrews Air Force base with that idiot Senator Robert Smith. Thank goodness they were turned away. I agree with Elian's father that he was betrayed by his Miami relatives. He has a right to be bitter.

It is good this Easter Sunday to think of that little boy spending quiet time with his father, step-mother (and now his only mother) and baby brother. What will happen next, we don't know, but at least Elian's father will in charge, as he should have been from the beginning.