

## IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

# A father's sacrifice

A few days ago I was prepared to write a passionate column about the 6-year-old Cuban boy found hanging desperately to an innertube off the coast of Florida, his mother and step-father having drowned. They were all trying to flee life in communist Cuba, as have many thousands before them.

The saving of Elian Gonzalez by Americans and his joining American relatives in Miami has caused a political uproar between Cuban expatriates in Miami and the government of Fidel Castro. Until yesterday I had the whole problem solved. The boy should be returned to his father. I had visions of the mother and stepfather leaving the country without the father's knowledge and I thought that alone was a dirty deed. And without a doubt, with the mother deceased, the father automatically would get custody unless there is a very good reason he shouldn't. The whole business resembled a kidnapping.

A delegation of the National Council of Churches visited Elian's family in Cuba and reported the family's church activity and love for their son and grandson. The church representatives concluded that Elian's father was a good man and had a steady relationship with his son, so should have the rights of any father in such a situation.

Varying reports and opinions have come from a number of dingbat sources. Senator Bob Smith, who recently left the Republican party to become a Reform candidate for President, visited Elian and his family in Miami. He reported that Elian told him (in Spanish, of course) that he wanted help to stay in America. Indiana Representative Dan Burton, head of the Government Reform Committee is the guy who issued a subpoena, all by himself, while congress was on vacation (but then, who can tell?) requesting that the 6-year-old appear before the committee. "You aren't serious,"

said talk show host Larry King. "You don't really want that poor child to come before the committee."

"No," said Burton, "it was just a way to delay his return to Cuba, so he would have an opportunity to go through the court system, apply for political asylum." The immigration service had already announced that Elian would be returned to his father in Cuba this Friday.

"Good," I thought. "That's the right thing to do." Then I began to hear more of the story. The story that Elian's father knew the boy and his mother were going to try to get to the United States and had approved it. The story that the father had tried several times himself to flee the country without success. What else can the man say at this point — with Castro and the whole government breathing down his neck, but that he wants the boy to come home and be with him in wonderful Cuba? Elian's father has remarried and has a baby. He is no doubt under close scrutiny. One commentator speculated he might even be under house arrest. It is odd that he has been invited to come to Miami to get his son and has refused.

So, what does Elian's father really want for him? Many Cubans in Florida tell stories of their parents sending them alone across the seas to freedom. I don't think most of us can imagine life in a dictatorship or under communism. Over the years families all over the world have made horrific sacrifices and endured life-long separations so their children could achieve a freedom they might never have.

Some things we may never know. But I'm beginning to suspect that Daddy has to put on a very brave act in Cuba while secretly hoping his son can stay in the land of the free.

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