

Newsday

LONG ISLAND

www.newsday.com

TUESDAY, OCT. 21, 2003 • SUFFOLK EDITION

One Dad's Guide for Unwed Parents-To-Be

After the divorce, Robert Cox Jr. ended up in one house and his two children in another. With the gripes against him as father and spouse revealed — exposed in a courtroom — Cox turned inward.

The corporate world had up to that point paid for the Tufts University grad's talents as a credit analyst in a bank, and then as a marketing rep for an international computer-maker. His salary, combined with his ex-wife's nursing paycheck, had financed a comfortable, occasionally lush, life.

But when the disappearance of the family he had conceived in his heart and known in the flesh proved a hurtful distraction, he opted out of the corporation, survived off his savings and credit cards and settled into a job cutting hair in JDJ Barber Shop. Two barbering veterans in that shop in Cox's home turf of Wyandanch embraced the new kid, teaching him what they had learned about human impulse and cutting heads.

The seasoned barbers shared with Cox their wisdom, informed not by academic pedigree, for they had none, but by personal experience — many

years of listening to what their customers had to say and watching what they did. "We Gotta Talk Baby," began as a quiet rumbling in his mind while he was cutting heads, reconfiguring his relationship with his children, from whom he was estranged, and volunteering for assorted community efforts. The 93-page paperback, which Cox self-published last year and makes

available at www.responsiblechoicesonline.com, is a product of his current career as a barber and lawyer (he also got his J.D. from Touro Law and passed the bar during that wandering period) and president of Responsible Choices Publishing Co.

"We Gotta Talk Baby" is the outgrowth of conversations he had with men who sat in his barber's chair and rattled off their travails as single parents tussling with

the mothers of their babies and feeling, in many instances, that they had no say at all. The paperback is partly a legal guide, partly a practical guide meant to set some ground rules between unwed parents so that, as Cox hopes, the kids are not caught in the middle. And, no, he is not encouraging people who ought not to be married to each other to make another gargantu-

an mistake by getting hitched.

The book is aimed at men and women but because he happens to be a man probably leans more heavily in that direction, Cox said. Through Page 60, "We Gotta Talk Baby" presents his take on who woman are, the baby-bearing choices they make, who men are, their capacity for impregnating, how Roe vs. Wade, a laudable law, gives women control over their bodies and how men are armed with nothing commensurate. The latter pages are dedicated to a short survey on sexual habits, abortion and other family issues and samples of what Cox has labeled "Notice of Pregnancy" and "Response to Notice of Pregnancy." Under each of those banners, a litany of statements is laid out in multiple-choice format — suggestions for how to raise the issue: "I respectfully inform you of this pregnancy to know your true feelings about us and the future of any child born of this pregnancy, if any" or "I respectfully inform you of this pregnancy to be assured that if a child is born of this pregnancy you will be supportive emotionally and financially."

And for the man whose feet are to the fire, this sampling of retorts: "I really do not like children" and "I must have DNA testing . . ." and ". . . I should have an option of custody and

care should you not be able to independently care for any child born of this pregnancy, as opposed to my paying you or the local department of social services / welfare child-support."

The intent here is that everyone is clear from the outset and that, for the sake of the children, everyone's choice is informed. Should the two parties ever end up squabbling in court, they will have already begun a paper trail, Cox said, and that will give the judge something to go by.

He is aware that the average mind will find his strategy something of a stretch, given the state of things and the fact that we have sadly come to accept the way in which too many babies are brought into the world willy-nilly. Cox should get a pat on the back for raising questions the rest of us are thinking but are too chicken to ask out loud.

"The idea is so novel, so easy, so simple. It is so necessary and so wanted," said Cox, 52.

"One of my friends said to me 'Do you know what you're doing?' And I, unsure, said, 'Yeah,' " he said. "Then she said 'What are you doing here? Trying to change the world? Trying to change the law?' Then she started cracking up and I realized she liked it." ■

Katti Gray's e-mail address is kgray@newsday.com.



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