

Natasha's Story

Family background:

This case study involves the mother Natasha and father Lucas and their two children, Elsa and Julia.

Natasha is American and Lucas is Swedish. The children are dual-citizens (Swedish/American). Natasha's eldest daughter Elsa was born in Denmark in 2009 and Julia was born in Sweden in 2013.

The parents met in 2005 in the States and moved to Denmark in 2009. They subsequently moved to Sweden at the beginning of 2013.

Before the initial move:

Before the family moved abroad initially the mother said she did not know about the law on habitual residence. "If I had known I would be trapped in Sweden I never would have left the U.S, and I wish that they would warn women..."

About the relationship breakdown:

The parents separated in 2016 with their divorce being finalised in 2017.

In 2009 the mother described incidents of domestic abuse perpetrated by the father involving: physical and emotional abuse towards the mother, physical abuse towards the children involving; pinning them up against the wall and physically hurting the children, often leaving bruises. Furthermore, Natasha has detailed the emotional abuse faced by her eldest daughter Elsa, Lucas continually blames and taunts his eldest daughter.

Natasha's daughters have been to the police four times. Natasha explains she feels regret at this decision because nothing has ever come of it, the social services have failed to deal with the confessions made by Elsa and Julia.

The mother said she felt unsupported during the relationship breakdown. Natasha feels that the abuse has not been dealt with effectively by the Social Services in Sweden. Natasha tells the interviewer that he continues to hurt her daughters, and yet they still have to see their father. Natasha states that in the Swedish system she has been accused of parental alienation, and as a result, the girls have to continue seeing their father despite his aggression towards them. In desperation, Natasha wrote to the American Embassy providing pictures of the bruises on her daughter, however they were unable to help.

After the relationship breakdown

After the relationship breakdown Natasha wanted to go back to the state she considers her home country (the U.S) to live with her children.

The reason she wanted to return to 'home country' are tantamount; the girls are not fully integrated in Sweden, they do not speak Swedish fluently, they struggle with



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having to see their father and they have an extensive network of cousins and close family in the U.S. From a financial perspective, Natasha would be able to return to work as a chartered accountant resulting in financial stability for her and the girls. Notwithstanding these issues, Natasha has been careful not to 'demonise' Sweden to the girls and has always explained that there is good and bad in both countries.

The mother is not eligible for social welfare support in Sweden. Natasha has drained all her savings and the father contributes nothing towards the children's upbringing.

Relocation / Leave to Remove:

Natasha has not applied for a Relocation Order. Natasha explains to us that in Sweden; "If you try and relocate it is almost viewed as child abuse, the idea being that children are entitled to have contact with both parents. However, it is difficult when the mother is the principal caretaker, this man is keeping me trapped."

The reason Natasha did not apply to Relocate is also informed by the legal advice she has obtained. Every lawyer she had spoken with advised her against it. Lawyers have told Natasha that in Sweden, a foreign parent is highly unlikely to obtain full custody of the children.

Natasha tells me that today the Social Services are taking more of an active role in ascertaining the physical abuse and emotional abuse faced by the children, she worries about the false accusations made by the father of her having borderline personality disorder. Natasha maintains that she would like to return home to the U.S with her daughters.