

Joanna Kramer testifies for custody of her son in Kramer vs. Kramer by Robert Benton

Joanna: Look, during the last five years of our marriage, I was scared and I was very unhappy. And in my mind I had no other choice but to leave. At the time I left I felt that there was something terribly wrong with me. And that my son would be better off without me. And it was only after I got to California that I realized, after getting into therapy, that I wasn't such a terrible person and just because I needed some kind of creative or emotional outlet other than my child, that didn't make me unfit to be a mother. I know I left my son. I know that that's a terrible thing to do. Believe me I have to live with that every day of my life. But in order to leave him, I had to believe that it was the only thing I could do. And that it was the best thing for him. However, I have since gotten some help, and I have worked very, very hard to become a whole human being. And I don't think I should be punished for that. And I don't think my little boy should be punished. Billy's only seven years old. He needs me. I'm not saying he doesn't need his father, but I really believe he needs me more. I was his mommy for five and a half years. And Ted took over that role for eighteen months. But I don't know how anyone can possibly believe that I have less of a stake in mothering that little boy than Mr. Kramer does. I'm his mother. I'm his mother.