



FATHER OF A CAUSE

SUPERPOP — Jerry Cammarata, winner of a paternity case, with two of his children.

Paternity - leave winner a 'superpop'

By **MARIAN J. MEYERS**
Staff Reporter

Jerry Cammarata has made fatherhood a cause.

Twelve years ago, at a time when most fathers seemed content to let their wives do the bulk of child rearing, Cammarata decided to sue the New York City Board of Education for paternity leave. The result was a landmark decision handed down by the Federal Equal Employment Opportunities Commission in 1972 supporting his right to take time off to be with his daughter.

Since then, Cammarata, 35, has established himself as a "superpop," a word that keeps cropping up in his press releases and which, for Cammarata, reflects his commitment to his three children — Elizabeth, 13, Michelle, 9, and Gerald, 1 — and to his wife, Margaret.

That commitment, he notes, is based on a combination of conventional and non-traditional notions about the family.

Like most traditionalists, he believes the family should be a close-knit source of strength, advice and support. The Staten Island resident also, however, believes the father's place should be equal to the mother's — in terms of responsibility as well as quantity and quality of time.

Being a father, Cammarata says, means "play, making decisions — very often against the wishes of children — but, most of all, it means listening." That philosophy is contained in his book, "The Fun Book of Fatherhood," published in 1978 and now being developed as a made-for-television movie.

Cammarata's ideas about fatherhood, he admits, are quite different from those he grew

up with as the only child in an Italian-American home on Staten Island.

"The Italian-American tradition in no way supports this kind of sharing attitude," he says. "In fact, just the opposite — the father provides the monetary support, and the mother provides the homemaking and child-rearing support."

Cammarata admits to having been just as traditional in his approach to child rearing and his career as anyone. It wasn't until his daughter asked him to bring home a rat from work — which he often referred to as the rat race — that he began to re-evaluate his priorities.

"That finally made me put everything together," he says of the incident.

"As we get hung up looking for the monetary success out there, we lose sight of the fact the children, above all things, really want us around."

The women's liberation movement and increasing public interest in paternity leave also contributed to his change of attitude, acknowledges Cammarata, who was a special education teacher in New York City when he sued for paternity leave.

After the EEOC ruling, Cammarata became a star. He was interviewed by reporters and appeared on television and radio talk shows across the nation.

Since the school system granted up to four years of maternity leave, he and his family were able to travel around the country making appearances. To cut costs during this time, he and his wife sold their home and one of the cars and moved in with her parents.



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Today, Cammarata holds two part-time positions as a business instructor at the City University of New York and at Wagner College on Staten Island. Half of his week is spent with his children, he says. When he and his friends go fishing, they always bring their children along.

But Cammarata's commitment to his children doesn't mean he's the perfect father and has all the answers, he admits. Making decisions provides moments of tension, indecision and challenge that make parenting dynamic, he explains. Making mistakes, he adds, provides room for growth.

"I think any parents who make out they are the know-it-alls and the intellectuals are fooling themselves more than the children," he says. "I make as many mistakes as any other dad. It's making the mistakes that makes parenting fun."

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