

'Superpop' Raises His Kids By Using Animal Instincts

By VICKIE KILGORE EAST

JERRY CAMMARATA, billed "Superpop" by media across the country in 1974 as the first father granted paternity leave by the courts, is still trying to live up to the image.

When Cammarata was denied the customary four-year leave without pay granted women by the New York City Board of Education for time at home with a newborn child, he took his case to the federal courts and won a year later under an anti-discrimination policy.

Now Cammarata has published a book on what he learned about child care.

The four years following the suit and the birth of his second daughter were spent sharing equally with his wife Margaret the responsibilities of parenting. That meant selling their house, one of their cars and moving in with her parents in order to live.

FRIENDS AND relatives thought he was crazy or at least guilty of shirking responsibilities as bread-winner. But it was worth it, he says, to be with his children, now ages 11 and 7, during their early years.

And he's reaping other benefits. The book—*The Fun Book of Fatherhood: Or, How the Animal Kingdom Is Helping To Raise the Wild Kids at Our House* (Pinnacle Books)—is successful, he says, and his test case is being made into a television movie and possible series by Ed Friendly Productions to be released in 1982 as "Superpop."

The offbeat paperback book tells "how you can take mundane chores of life and package them to be fun and at the same time let it be a learning experience," says Cammarata, who is in Nashville this week developing theme songs for the television movie.

It also demonstrates how the parenting styles of animals can be copied in rearing children. The outspoken Cammarata says there's "no one way to do anything right—certainly no one way to bring up kids."

"**THERE ISN'T** anything we can do the animals haven't done first," he adds. "There really are a variety of ways of parenting. We have to look at the way animals live and ask what is it about a certain animal we like."

Then what? Adopt the ways of that animal, he suggests. "Try to work on your own instincts."

A bit wacky, but's that's the kind of guy he is. (He also has a spot in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the longest recorded solo singing marathon in a bathtub, without water, while being towed around New York City—a feat to teach his children the value of perseverance.)

The youthful Cammarata says if there's anything he learned during those years at home all day with two children, it was "don't tell kids what to do . . . through conversation allow it to emerge. Through examples you settle a lot of problems."

He also learned: "A pat on the behind never hurt a child, but anybody who spansks and walks away is committing a grievous sin. A child must know immediately what he's been spanked for. I see it in the animal kingdom and it works."

"Never talk down to a child," he advises. "Always talk as an equal. They don't always understand what you say but they understand what you feel about what you say."

CAMMARATA SAYS there was "nothing I found distasteful" about tending young children. "I realized there are a lot of things husbands don't realize. It makes you wonder why they (mothers) don't all go to the cashew nut house."

Now he is working parttime as a speech pathologist. His wife also works parttime and they still share housework and child care equally. They also still live with her parents and "always will," he says, because the extended



'Superpop' Jerry Cammarata
'Work on your instincts'

family situation has worked so well for them.

He hasn't returned to teaching because the New York City Board of Education has included him in a block of teachers considered laid off. He is again taking issue with the system in the courts.

Since his unprecedented court decision in 1974 Cammarata says he has documented about three dozen other instances of paternity leave and heard indirectly of many more.

He feels society has awakened "to a new era of parenting, an era of shared responsibility in providing tender-loving care to children. As a delegate to the White House Conference on Families he's hoping to open the eyes of employers to the needs of fathers.

As far as paternity leave, "I'm not suggesting all dads do it," he says, but advocates more flexible work hours to allow both parents to spend time with children, something he says it's time parents and employer consider.

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Jerry Garrard
Public Relations:

Communication Center
Suite PH
185 Maryland Avenue
Staten Island, NY 10305
(212) 720-6400