INSIDE THEIR MARRIAGE

Hoping for a baby, launching a TV show. Hollywood’s happiest odd couple talk about how they get through the rough spots.
Richard Price
Private investigator, St. Petersburg, Fla.
Tracked down more than 100 missing kids
Specialty: children caught in custodial disputes

It was known as the “reverse Elian” — a Cuban mother who took her 5-year-old son away from his American father and sailed from Florida to Cuba in 2000. Federal authorities knew she was there but were powerless to do anything. “The FBI couldn’t get into Cuba,” says Price, 70, who took the case on behalf of the boy’s father. “So we went in.” Price got a special license from the U.S. Department of the Treasury that allowed him to enter Cuba, tracked down the mother and lobbied Cuban authorities to let the child return to the U.S. The process took nine months, but “we brought both the fugitive and the child back home,” says Price. “The FBI was waiting for us when we got off the plane in Miami.”

In his 30-year career Price has located more than 100 missing children—mostly in custodial dispute cases—in Egypt, Germany, El Salvador and other countries. A former Florida state representative, he works with attorney Michael Berry, an international child-abduction specialist, to enforce U.S. custody orders in foreign lands. “We don’t go in and beat people up or shoot at them,” says the married father of eight. “We do everything as legal as can be. We use every available court order to retrieve a child.”

First, however, he has to find them. In 2001 Price used a tip from a car rental agency to locate a boy smuggled across the English Channel and into France in a TV box. In 1996 he found a California girl abducted by her mother, a case that had baffled investigators for two years. “The father was just about broke after trying for years to find her,” says Price, who agreed to take the case only if he felt he had a good chance of succeeding. “We found her in New York City in four weeks.”

Price relies mainly on gumshoe standbys like travel records, credit card receipts and Internet data, but the most effective tool in his box of tricks is cold hard cash. “Good rewards lead to good tips,” says Price, who recently found a 17-year-old runaway by posting $100 reward signs in St. Petersburg. “Money gets people to talk.”

Snatched from the Sandbox

Bored watching the little league game, Morgan Nick, 6, asked her mother if she could play in the sand. Always a protective parent, Colleen Nick considered saying no but changed her mind. Then there was an exciting play. The crowd stood to cheer. Colleen turned away for an instant—and her little girl was gone.

That night—June 5, 1995—was the last anyone has seen of Morgan Nick. Although the search quickly expanded from the town of Alma, Ark., there was no sign of the blue-eyed blonde who loved cats and Barbie dolls. “Whenever we get leads, we go with them,” says Cpl. Donnie Belew of the Arkansas State Police. “Morgan’s case is very active.” After eight years, the hurt—and hope—remains fresh for Colleen, now 38. “One day I plan to look Morgan in the eye,” says Colleen, whose lobbying helped bring about Arkansas’s Morgan Nick Alert System in 1993, and say, “We never, never gave up.”

“I fight for Morgan as hard as I can,” says Colleen Nick (with trooper Donnie Belew in March).

By BILL HEWITT, ALEX TRESNIEWSKI and PAMELA LAMBERT
Steve Barnes in Little Rock, Kristin Harmel in Orlando, Lori Rossa in Miami, Maureen Harrington in Los Angeles and Amanda Orr in Washington, D.C.