When parents divorce, their children often become part of two distinct families. Unfortunately, many schools have not yet developed policies and practices that take the needs of both families into account. As a result, children may not complete homework assignments on time, or may not be able to attend school events and activities because one parent may not have appropriate information.

Performance and attendance may suffer, and tension may increase between parents/stepparents and children, leading to greater stress for students.

As is often the case, change needs to start with parents. Parents should contact the teacher often. Show up at school events. Ask for extra copies of notices and newsletters. Offer assistance. The more often school staff members see and hear from both parents and stepparents, the sooner they will accept two-family situations as typical, and positive. And once that happens, the culture of the school can change.

What can school administrators do to ease the tensions for children who move between homes? The first and most important step is to make sure all school personnel understand that stepfamilies are the norm for many children, not a deviation from some two-parent, one-family “standard.” Furthermore, they need to assume that both a child’s parents, and stepparents, want to be as involved as possible in their children’s school life. Even if, unfortunately, this isn’t the case, establishing a positive attitude about parent and stepparent involvement will improve communication all around. A well-worded memo or a session at a staff development seminar can go a long way toward creating school-wide awareness.

With an accepting climate established, school leaders need to make these attitudes official and practical:

1. **PUT IT IN WRITING**. Adopt official Board policy that ensures communication with both a child’s parents. Making it official makes it easier to ensure it gets done.

2. **AVOID “KIDMAIL” AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE**. We all know when children are responsible for passing information to parents, the information sometimes doesn’t get through. Avoiding kidmail can also reduce a lot of pressure on children who might feel “caught in the middle” between parents who may not have the best communication relationship themselves.

3. **SEND DUPLICATE COPIES** of important materials, especially performance reports, notices of fees for field trips and events, and permission forms, to both households. This can be accomplished through mailings and notices in the school’s weekly or monthly newsletters (which should, of course, be sent to both households, too). Pickup points can be established in the school office so parents can drop by for copies of materials.

4. **USE MORE THAN ONE MEANS TO COMMUNICATE** (mailings, e-mail, telephone calls, etc.) with families. The PTA or other parent groups can help here: try telephone or e-mail round-robin in which one parent contacts two others, and those two contact two others, and so on.

5. **CREATE CALL-IN AND/OR ON-LINE HOMEWORK HOTLINES, events calendars, scheduling information, etc., that parents, students and staff can access, 24-hours a day**. This could also be maintained by parent volunteers, or perhaps by a group of students. What about a technology class project? A TAG activity? Kids could learn and get credit while they provide an invaluable service.

If these types of practices don’t exist in your children’s school, ask for them. These small changes, while specifically targeted to kids with stepfamilies, will make things better for all students. Responding to the needs of students’ families shows the kind of open and courteous communication we could all do well to imitate.
From the Editor

By Jean McBride, M.S., LMFT

It’s that time of year when families are thinking about school. The paraphernalia of summer gets packed away for another season, replaced with notebooks, pencils, laptops and school clothes. The theme of our fall issue is appropriately “back to school”, and we’ve got a variety of articles devoted to the topic. Board member William Bainbridge, Ph.D. starts things off with an article about how schools can help stepfamilies. SAA President Marge Engel continues the theme in her President’s Message. We are delighted to feature the zany poetry of board member Deena Stacer. In their column, Stepping Up!, Jim Hibbard and Mary Siebe discuss how school issues impact the stepfamily. In the column Stepfamilies and the Law, Laura Morgan addresses wills. And be sure to check out Patricia Estess’ review of the book, Second Wives: The Pitfalls and Rewards of Marrying Widowers and Divorced Men.

In Stepfamilies for Professionals, Barbara Perlmutter shares her process of getting a specialty practice of working with stepfamilies up and running. Kay Pasley, Ed.D. reviews research about adolescents participating in household labor. No it is not from a science fiction journal! And for those professionals who work with stepfamilies, check out our Professional Training Institute this fall in Houston, Texas, October 6 & 7.

The pull out section for kids this time deals with, you guessed it, back to school!

We at SAA hope your school year is off to a glorious start. Enjoy your families.
here’s excited chatter, periodic laughter, and the occasional crash and tinkling sound (closely followed by “oops!”) wafting down the hallway that connects the kitchen to my home office. A daughter and a stepdaughter, together with a mutual friend, are busily preparing a quiche brunch for their baby sister’s bridal shower tomorrow. The “baby” is 29 years old. (In a recent conversation with other mothers of adult children, someone asked how long we are expected to continue actively parenting our kids. Not sure of the precise answer but it’s at least through the age of 38 – of that I’m certain because that’s the age of our oldest daughter!)

Our grown daughters, who wander in and out as they pass through Boston, have evolving needs for things such as the most recent house key. But many of their needs have remained the same for a long time. A new toothbrush, homemade lemonade, the ingredients for fried potatoes and onions, and parental attention to stories about jobs, friends, house plans for a family room addition, or the inside scoop on the current man-of-the-hour. In fact, for the last 13 years, Steve and I have become so accustomed to having grown children around that we had an epiphany a few weeks ago.

For the past couple of summers, SAA has presented a class on stepfamilies at Chautauqua, New York. This year, Steve and two of our granddaughters, Sigourney (8) and Alexis (6) joined me during the first week in July. We enrolled the girls in a camp-like program at the Chautauqua Boys and Girls Club – which brings me to the point of this message. When you are not the biological parents, handling myriad registration papers, teacher/counselor meetings, and medical emergencies is problematic. Because our girls were teens and older when we married, these things were pretty much non-issues for our household. It’s the grandchildren who give us our school/home experience.

I handled the initial registration by telephone. No problem. They were delighted to accept my credit card number. It was the packet of information forms that created the jolt. The girls call me Marmee, I’ve been part of their lives since conception, and yet to the school system my status was less than an also-ran – I was clearly a nonentity. To begin with, I didn’t have the medical information to complete the Health and Emergency form. Yes, I knew about medical authorization forms were within hours of being critical to her welfare! To receive a copy of the forms I use for Medical Permission to Treat Minor Child. My stepdaughter completed the form with medical information – including her notarized signature and the girls’ medical insurance cards – that gave Poppie and Marmee the ability to authorize emergency medical procedures. That’s when I realized this type of authorization should be in the hands of all stepparent caretakers and on file in the pediatrician’s office – if bio moms and dads are truly concerned about the best interests of their child.

Schools probably need a lot more stepparent participation – or legal intervention – before there will be any significant changes in their routines. In the meantime, there are things that parents and stepparents can do to increase awareness and sensitivity to the stepparent/stepchild relationship.

It is critical that teachers, counselors, and administrators are informed about the student’s housing arrangements and a child focus on the part of the parents. Let’s go one step further. To provide the best safety net for children’s health, education, and general welfare, make sure that all active parents and stepparents are named and included in all school records, verbal information, and written correspondence. A stepparent is an integral partner in the parenting team – the child views the stepparent as such and so does at least one (if not both) of the biological parents. Schools need to do a reality check and create forms and communication distribution methods that acknowledge the fact that many of their students have two homes. There is simply no good reason for the local school systems to pit two households against each other by deliberately creating a communication challenge.

PS. By the way, Alexis waited until she returned home to fall off the monkey bars and break her left arm. Those medical authorization forms were within hours of being critical to her welfare! To receive a copy of the forms I use for Medical Permission to Treat Minor Child and the Duplicate Information Request to Schools, send a stamped self-addressed envelope and small charitable donation to the SAA Office and we’ll send them to you by return mail.
n issue that often arises when parties divorce and remarry is when it is appropriate to rewrite a will. First, it is always advisable to write a new will after a divorce. Under the common law, that is, the law as it developed through cases decided by judges through the centuries, a divorce did not act to revoke a previously executed will. The reasoning was that parties are always free to make a will, and it could very well be that, despite the divorce, the testator, that is, the one who made the will, intended to keep the other spouse as a beneficiary under the will.

Most states now have statutes that provide that divorce acts to revoke a previously made will, if not the whole will, then at least those portions of the will that relate to the divorced spouse. The Uniform Probate Code, in effect in most states, provides that divorce or annulment of marriage acts to revoke a previously made will.

Second, it is equally wise to make a new will after a remarriage. Under the common law, the will of a man was not revoked by his subsequent marriage, while the will of a woman was revoked by subsequent marriage. The rule developed this way because it used to be that a woman could not make a will during marriage. Thus, if the will was not revoked upon marriage, the will would become irrevocable during the marriage, and the woman would be disinheriting her new husband. The law wanted to avoid this result.

The common law, however, has been supplanted in every state by statutes specifically addressing the question of whether a marriage revokes a previously made will. Prior to the enactment of the Uniform Probate Code, which is now in effect in most states, in some states, the will of a man and a woman was revoked by a subsequent marriage, except in a number of specific circumstances:

(1) where the will is made in the exercise of a power of appointment;
(2) where the will is made specifically in contemplation of marriage;
(3) where the will is made according to the provisions of a prenuptial agreement;
(4) where the new spouse is specifically provided for in the will.

Today, under the Uniform Probate Code, a uniform law governing wills, trusts, and estates that is consistent and the same in most states, a marriage does not revoke the will of either a man or a woman. Obviously, a check of the law in one’s own state is essential to determine whether a marriage to a new spouse revokes a will made after a divorce from a previous spouse.

Even if a previous will is not revoked by a subsequent marriage, it would be advisable to make a new will in order to make provisions for a new spouse. Under the Uniform Probate Code, if a will makes no provision for a new spouse, the new spouse can disavow the will and take her “forced share.” This means that the new spouse can take a specified portion of the estate, regard-
STEPFAMILIES FALL 2000

FIRST DAZE OF SCHOOL
By DEENA STACER, SAA Board Member

My alarm went off, at a quarter to eight.
And just my luck, we were kind of late.
I had four kids, to rush to school.
No kid could miss. This was my rule.
I grabbed my slippers, then hit the floor.
I fired commands, from the bathroom door.
I took a breath and squawked real high,
Until my throat and lips went dry.
“It’s time to rise, you slovenly slugs!”
“Get in the bath and scrub those mugs!”
“And wash your face and hands of grime.”
“And do it quick, we’re out of time!”
I snagged my robe, then fell down stairs.
I tripped across the kitchen chairs.
I rushed to make each child their lunch...
When beneath my feet, I heard a crunch.
The chips I’d bought, the night before,
Were smashed to bits; there were no more.
The sandwich meat, chilled in the fridge,
Looked rather green and smelled a smidge.
I tossed some coins in each lunch sack.
They’d have to buy, a “junk-food” snack.
I curled my hair, in record time.
Then heard the school bell ring and chime.
I stretched their shirts. I pulled their collars,
“Now off to school, and act like scholars!”
The girls each promised, not to fight.
I kissed my son and stepchild’s head.
They smiled real weak, then turned bright red.
I’d done my part, each child in place;
A stupid grin spread ‘ cross my face.
“I’d pulled it off.” “Don’t call me fool!”
“I was in charge.” “In charge of school.”
I began to feel...well, invincible!
After all, I was
The......Principal!

less of whether the new spouse is included in the will or not. Obviously, this will reduce the amount of the testator’s estate and what the testator ultimately leaves other heirs. It will also cause unnecessary litigation that will, again, cost the estate.

THE BEST ADVICE is to make a new will upon any life changing event – marriage, divorce, the birth of a new child. It is also advisable to write a new will if the testator wishes to leave any money or property to a stepchild. This is because the law is relatively unclear whether leaving a gift to “my children” includes a stepchild.

WHEN TESTAMENTARY GIFTS are made to a class of beneficiaries, such as “my children,” the identity of the individual class members is not disclosed in the will. Thus, the answer to the question of whether “my children” includes stepchildren is determinative. The law provides that there is a rebuttable presumption that stepchildren and other relatives by marriage are excluded from class gifts. This means that it is up to the stepchildren to convince the court, with evidence, that it was the testator’s intent that the stepchildren were to be included in the class gift. It is usually very difficult to present this type of evidence, so if you wish to include your stepdaughter, it would be advisable to so state in the body of the will.
Second Wives: The Pitfalls and Rewards of MARRYING WIDowers and Divorced Men

By Susan Shapiro Barash

If there’s anything wrong with this book, it’s the title. First wives, second wives, women marrying for the first time to men who are either widowed or divorced, and the men themselves would benefit from the insights and wise counsel from *Second Wives*, by Susan Shapiro Barash.

Certainly Barash, a critical thinking/gender professor at Marymount Manhattan College, has a point of view that is most empathic to second wives. Probably because she is one – twice. She reports that psychologists and sociologists confirm that second wives, whether they know it or not, are in pain to varying degrees. A second wife often feels threatened by an ex-wife, especially if that woman is the mother of her husband’s children, or someone she finds herself “sharing” her husband’s time, money or energy with. She might be jealous that she was not the “first” to experience something with this man, or find herself making mental comparisons between herself and the “first” woman. Some women even equate their second wife status to being number two.

The strains on this marriage – a vocal ex-wife, children, and finances – are often too much for the new union to handle, hence the 60 percent failure rate for remarriages. So far, all of this sounds familiar, and if Barash stopped here, we wouldn’t be reviewing the book. Fortunately she doesn’t.

She points out that the responsibility for a successful remarriage doesn’t lie solely in how the new wife handles her new role. It is equally dependent on her husband. What has he learned from the mistakes of his first marriage? How clearly has he defined the boundaries of his ex-wife’s involvement with him? How guilty does he feel about breaking up the first marriage? How committed is he to putting the new marriage first?

Even if all these questions can’t be answered in a way that puts the second wife at ease, that does not signal the end of the marriage. Good communication, time, a second wife with a keen sense of what her husband needs to achieve the balance between the old and new – all improve the marriage’s chances of success. As Barash says, the relationship of the husband and his first wife will not necessarily be mirrored in his second marriage. “In an equal partnership, the dynamic is specific to the two individuals.”

And what about the second wife? What’s her role in making the marriage successful?

Some of what troubles a second marriage she has no direct control of. And, I think that’s important for second wives to hear and understand. Vengeful and vindictive ex-wives who cannot put the past to rest and who are unable to get on with their own lives can be terribly threatening. A vengeful first who influences the children against their father and stepmother and exerts continuing money pressures can strain the new couple’s relationship to the breaking point. But certain positive occurrences can make a difference, like when the first finds a romantic attachment or remarries, has a baby with her new partner, moves out of town, or recognizes her waning power.

And it’s in this “waning power” that a second wife has the most control. Barash elaborates on many ways second wives can establish a better sense of place and self. Among them are how to better communicate your dissatisfaction to your husband, how not to get caught up in a tug of war between you and his children, how to accept the realization that he had a life before you, how to protect your turf yet still ease the tension among the families, and how to create a life with your husband that is unique to the two of you.

Two chapters in the book deserve special mention because they deal with frequently overlooked issues. “The Rebecca Syndrome: Widowers’ Second Wives” addresses second wives who are haunted by the memory of an idealized deceased first wife. It has important suggestions of ways to deal with that. And “Reuniting Long Lost Loves” explains why marriages to boyfriends of one’s youth are so powerful... and can be so successful.

With all the problems and the inherited baggage that a woman faces when marrying a widower or divorced man, Barash says second wives are at advantage. They enter a marriage to a man who, hopefully, has attained a certain maturity. Hopefully too, he now knows what he wants and what type of person he partners best with. He probably has already established himself financially and in his career. And he is likely to appreciate his new wife’s qualities more fully and be more committed to making the marriage work.

Remarriage is a commitment to the future. It obviously needs constant work. But it also needs celebration – the ultimate theme of this book. “If the second wife discovers a true soul mate in the second marriage, the second marriage exists as the only marriage,” Barash concludes.
Welcome to Stepping Up! This article is part of a series that will hopefully provide a practical and lighthearted look at stepparenting. As stepparents ourselves, we have lived (sometimes barely) through an accumulation of twenty-nine years of “trial and error” stepparenting and various stepfamily relationships. We did it right, we did it wrong and we learned from both. Our purpose in this column is to bring a real world perspective to stepparenting, offering our insights and experiences related to specific topics and readers’ questions.

As we pondered the topic of “back to school”, we were reminded of how different our experiences had been in our different relationships. While going back to school is often a positive change from the chaos of summer, we found that it can pose difficult choices for stepfamilies.

MARY: One of the memories of my daughter Jamie going back to school was the pressure put on me to volunteer for helping out at her school. Jamie’s father was out-of-state and Patrick, my second husband, adopted an uninvolved approach to stepparenting; after all, Jamie already had a father. So the responsibility for helping out at school events fell to me. Since I was working two jobs, it was next to impossible for me to find time to volunteer. Although I attended Jamie’s school performances and important teacher conferences, I wasn’t able to help out with additional school activities, which was sometimes hard for Jamie to understand. Learning from our mistakes, Jamie and I began to discuss the school calendar at the beginning of each school year. We would review what events she felt were important for me to attend and which ones were less important. And together we made choices and compromises.

JIM: My children, Craig and Jacy, were in junior high when I was divorced. Moving from the only home the kids had known to a town-home meant the kids would have to change schools at the start of the next school year. I had to “stretch the truth” about where we lived so that they could stay in school with their friends rather than having their lives disrupted further by attending a new school. After Mary and I met and were married, we moved to our new home, presenting yet another change in schools for the children. My most notable experiences around them going back to school are of the “hoops” we had to go through to keep the kids in the schools they preferred and which met their emotional as well as educational needs.

Mary: Wasn’t there a problem with you getting school announcements?

JIM: One year I just stopped getting information about the kids’ open houses and grades. When I inquired with the school district, they informed me the address for the children had been changed by their mother to her address without my being informed.

When the kids were in junior high and high school, communication with my ex-spouse became critical to maintaining normalcy for the kids. This was often exacerbated by the school district’s insensitivity to stepfamily issues. When I asked that school announcements be sent to their mother and I both, I was told that it was impossible to have more than one mailing address per child. And relying on the children to inform us proved unreliable. They would forget or get distracted, as kids will do.

After a few such incidents, I had to develop better communication with my ex-wife for the sake of the children and I am grateful that my ex-wife responded. I know that this is not always the case between divorced parents. For the sake of stepparents today, I can only hope that the record keeping systems in public schools have become more sensitive to stepfamily issues.

Then there were the step dynamics experienced as my children entered college. Each year Mary and I met with my ex-wife and her husband to discuss the ever-increasing financial needs of the kids; however there was little change in their financial support from that outlined in the divorce. To take up the slack, Mary worked more to

Continued on page 8
C an children ever have too many caring adults in their lives? While I do not know of any specific research on this issue, my gut instinct and my understanding of human growth and development would emphatically say “No, it is not possible to have too many caring individuals in a child’s life.” What is possible, however, is to have too many adults who care about a child but who cannot communicate, agree or get along with each other. This situation can be very detrimental to a child.

It is, in fact, in this latter position that children in almost every newly formed stepfamily finds themselves. It is, therefore, vital that the parents recognize this situation and actively work to find ways to understand and address the situation. The adults, while not intending to harm their children, often have not fully resolved the issues surrounding the termination or loss of their relationship with their first spouse. And, if they have resolved them, these issues often reappear once a remarriage occurs. Emotional wounds which were thought to be healed are reopened. As this process happens, it is generally the children who begin to act out the dynamics which are occurring.

Fortunately, there are solutions to these issues, and life for the children and the adults can get better and can be rewarding.

It is for this very purpose that the Stepfamily Association of America was established some 20 years ago. We are here to help provide solutions. We want to make sure that children, parents and professionals understand the dynamics which occur in stepfamilies and what can be done to create a healthy, caring environment for their children.

We often hear the phrase “it takes a village to raise a child.” While there is a good deal of truth in this statement, we must make sure the members of the village are not at war with each other. If they are, the village approach to raising a child will do more harm than good.

MARY: I often wondered if there wasn’t some karmic reason why I supported three people through degree programs (my second husband, my daughter, and myself) and now find myself helping put two additional people (Craig and Jacy) through college as well!

In reviewing our experiences, we see that “back to school” means not only are the kids returning to places of learning, it means that parents and stepparents have new opportunities to learn to communicate better with spouses, children, stepchildren, ex-spouses, teachers and administrators, and the list goes on. We acknowledge that our “back to school” experiences may be different from stepfamilies with younger children and situations where both parents have school-age children from previous marriages. And we believe the key to a successful school year, for parents, stepparents and children, is the same: learning to communicate better with everyone involved.

To submit your stepfamily questions or stories to “Stepping Up!” send them to: Stepfamily Association of America, 650 J Street, Suite 205, Lincoln, NE, 68508.

**Back to School Memories**
Continued from page 7

accommodate these additional expenses.

Mary: I often wondered if there wasn’t some karmic reason why I supported three people through degree programs (my second husband, my daughter, and myself) and now find myself helping put two additional people (Craig and Jacy) through college as well!

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Some people have grandmas who quilt.

We have a grandma who tees off at 8, lunches at the club at noon and cocktails at 5.

That would be my husband’s stepmother, who lives on the 18th fairway in a posh Florida condo decorated in a style befitting of an active Florida retiree.

Glass-topped tables. Silk plants. Expensive collectibles. And white.

You walk through Grandma Peg’s front door onto a sea of plush white carpet set off by a huge white couch that draws kid dirt like a magnet.

You can bet we put our three young ones through the drill before we went to visit for the first time in five years at spring break:

Little shoes will be removed at the door. Little hands will be clasped behind the back while admiring the collectibles. There will be no roughhousing, especially near the Mexican statuettes. Meals will be tiptoed across the white carpet to the sun porch.

We still managed to flub up.

“Omigod,” my husband whispered, pointing to the floor where the kids lay watching “The Lion King” with Grandma after a day at Jungle Larry’s, her treat. “What is that?”

“It looks like that piece of chocolate candy YOU gave the kids after dinner,” I mouthed back.

“Let’s get the bleach,” my husband whispered.

“Are you housekeeping challenged?” I demanded.

“We’ll cover it with a shoe,” he said

“For four days?”

We ultimately decided we had to tell her.

“I’m not going to tell her,” my husband said. “You tell her.”

“She’s your stepmother. You tell her.”

“I’m not going to tell her.”

We told her.

She sat on the floor with a sponge and a cup of cold water, not to mention patience and love, and happily re-

moved all signs of our imperfection.

Next came the problem with the delicate wrought iron screened door that we kept slamming shut, even though we weren’t supposed to touch it.

There was the special wooden bowl that a special friend had given her that wasn’t supposed to get wet and we filled with salad and Italian dressing.

There was the expensive beach towel that got lost at the beach. There was a second spill, this time a whole can of ginger ale, on the white carpet. There was perhaps the most colorful offense – a red marker drying in the dryer for 45 minutes, rendering plush yellow towels orange and an entire white dryer drum, poxed.

Through it all, she never flinched.

She took young Benjamin into her lap and read “The Little Engine That Could.”

She took us not just to Jungle Larry’s but out to eat every night.

She sent us to her pool during the day, let the two older kids drive her golf cart and me, her Cadillac. She took me shopping for a new swimsuit, during which we had intimate talks about my children, her stepson and my own mother.

Because of the expense of traveling with a family of five, we don’t get to visit Grandma Peg, or for that matter any of our other far-flung family members, very often.

Always before we go, my husband and I worry.

Always when we get there, we are overcome.

Grandma Peg may have more to do with her life than sew. She’s “just” the stepmother.

But she’s still Grandma. She still loves us uncondi-
tionally.

And for weary parents living far from the arms of extended family, that is a breath of fresh air.

This article is reprinted with permission from Debra-Lynn B. Hook (dlbhook@yahoo.com), who is the mother of Chris, 11 1/2, Emily 7 1/2, and Benjamin, 3. She is the author of “Bringing Up Mommy,” available by writing Hook c/o Knight Ridder, 471 Dansel Street, Kent, Ohio, 44240.
USA TODAY
Monday, August 21, 2000
Teachers Schooled in Family Ties – parents and experts press the point that schools must relate to non traditional families.

THE STAR LEDGER (Newark, NJ)
Sunday, June 18, 2000, “Make Room for Stepdaddy.”

EL PASO TIMES,
June 18, 2000, “Honoring Stepdads” by Maribel Villaiva

BOSTON GLOBE
July 16, 2000, “State Pursuit of Deadbeat Parents Shows a Troubling Zeal, Some Say” by Tatsha Robertson

THE SUN NEWS
June 6, 2000, “Camp Comforts Kids of Divorce” by Johanna Wilson

FAMILY NEWS (San Rafael, CA)
July, 2000, “Against All Odds – Stepparenting in the 21st Century” by Astrid Scholz, SAA Advisory Council Member

TIME MAGAZINE
June 19, 2000, “Twice as Nice” with SAA Board Member Dr. Roger Coleman

PARENTING
June/July 2000, “Two Sets of Rules,” quoting Dr. Mark Fine, SAA Advisory Council; and “When Kids Get Territorial,” quoting SAA Board Chairman Jerry Devine, and SAA president Dr. Margorie Engel.
Thanks to Christy Borgeld, Coordinator of Stepfamily Activities for SAA, we celebrated our second annual Stepfamily Day.

In her suggested Proclamation 2000 she mentions “thousands of loving stepparents and stepchildren who are daily reminders of the joy, trials, and triumphs of the stepfamily experience and of the boundless love contained in the bond between all types of parents and children.”

It is so heartening to see those words in print. It should gladden the hearts of all stepfamilies. So much of what is written in the media is negative about us. We who “man the trenches” in chapters all too often hear about the “trials” but we must remember that the people who come to our chapters are willing to be supported and educated about stepfamilies so they can join the thousands of stepfamilies in celebration of the “joys and boundless love.” I salute these parents who come to the meetings because they are open and willing to do what it takes to succeed.

Our chapter, like many, made plans to get together for a picnic on September 16 and our members got to meet the children from these families who are beneficiaries of the support and education that result from their parents taking the time to attend the meetings.

Speaking of education, many of our families have started taking parenting classes and feel that they benefit from establishing not his or her parenting style but “our” parenting style. Many newly remarried families run into parenting problems as their first “bump” on the stepfamily road. All parents, step or otherwise, encounter disagreements with parenting styles. Dealing with the new family situation may heighten our awareness and signal that a change is needed. Certainly, some of the behavior is due to the many changes and adjustments to the new situation, but all children need guidance and structure (even when they are with us only a short time). By learning to understand our children’s behavior and how to deal with it effectively – with love and respect – we make family life happier for all.

E-mail me at jwegrcaol.com to comment, question, or to chat.
Steps to Stepfamily Success

Plan to have family meetings at least once a month or, if problems arise, more often. Establish guidelines to follow.

Educate Yourself! Read! Participate in stepfamily workshops and SAA chapter support meetings.

Time alone as a couple is valuable. Spend at least 20 minutes of relaxed time alone with each other every day.

Strengthen the couple relationship. Use good positive communication skills. Develop leadership as a couple. Fight fairly!

And the smartest step to stepfamily success is to join SAA now! Complete the application form below.

SAA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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<td>PHONE #</td>
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