

SAA FAMILIES

A Quarterly Publication of the Stepfamily Association of America

Volume 20, Number 2

Summer 2001

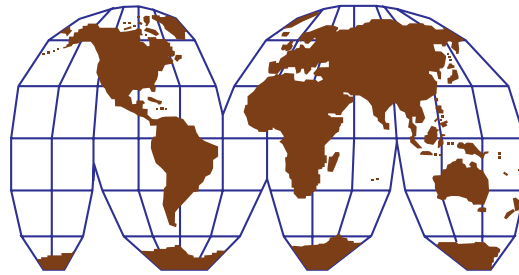
Stepfamilies International

By MARGORIE ENGEL, SAA PRESIDENT

While laws, policies, and social customs may differ, stepfamily dynamics within our homes remain surprisingly similar across national boundaries. SAA knows this because we have been asked for information and advice from 17 divergent societies and, in New Orleans at our National Conference on Stepfamilies, had the pleasure of meeting attendees from Brazil and New Zealand. Claire Cartwright, a PhD student in the Department of Psychology at the University of Auckland, presented a Poster Session on "Young Adults' Perceptions of the Impact of Stepfamily Dynamics on Biological Relationships with Custodial Parents." Moises Groisman, MD and Family Therapist in Rio de Janeiro, is now making plans to organize a stepfamily conference and professional training program in Brazil.

Japanese television has shown particular interest in American stepfamilies. NHK, Japan Broadcasting Corporation for Japanese public television, created a program on our stepfamilies for "Project 2000," as part of their programming on families around the world. Their film crew joined the New Jersey SAA Chapter for both a meeting and their Stepfamily Day celebration. In addition, they taped a segment of the Vishers' family reunion in California, our board meeting in Vancouver, a wedding ceremony including the Family Medallion in Kansas City, and new Connecticut SAA members in the process of becoming a stepfamily. A Japanese stepmother watched this program, wrote to us that there is no Japanese word for "stepfamily," and traveled alone to the Stepmothers International StepTogether 2000 retreat in Colorado. In

the meantime, TBS News, another Japanese television station, arrived to tape stepfamily activities – fascination with the idea of two homes, two moms, and two different households/sets of rules – of two of our board members in the San Francisco area. As a result of all this activity, we have been able to make introductions among the two television stations and the Japanese stepmom with the hope that they will work together to financially aid the development of a Stepfamily Support Group in Osaka, Japan.



In Italy, educators, mediators, and therapists are mobilizing to provide support, directly or indirectly, to families involved in a process which shows specific critical moments and developmental tasks within the concept of "family constellation." With this mandate, Silvia Mazzoni, PhD and Researcher in Dynamics Psychology, Universita "La Sapienza" of Rome and Marisa Malagoli Togliatti, Professor of Developmental and Family Relationships Psychodynamics, Universita "La Sapienza" of Rome, developed the International Congress and Workshop March 22–23, 2001 in Rome.

Dr. Mazzoni invited two representatives from the United States. Dr. Scott Browning discussed clinical strategies for stepfamily therapy and provided a workshop with commentary and suggestions for working with the attending clinicians' current caseload. Dr. Margorie Engel spoke about "The Plight of Children When Their Parents Remarry: An Interdisciplinary Peek," and consulted on ways that the University of Rome might incorporate legal and financial segments within their growing stepfamily resources.

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FROM THE EDITOR

By JEAN MCBRIDE, M.S., LMFT

Welcome to the summer edition of Stepfamilies. We at SAA hope this season finds your stepfamily thriving and busy making plans to do at least a few of the traditional summer activities. I'm talking about things like vacations, picnics, hiking, swimming and, lazy days at the beach. It seems with busy schedules, year-round school in some parts of the country, and already over-scheduled kids, summer experiences for families have changed.

For stepfamilies where children are typically moving between homes, summer is often a time of transition. Kids coming and going can be more stressful than lazy for all parties involved! No matter what summer looks like for your stepfamily, I invite you to do what you can to slow the pace for yourself and your family. Initiate a family discussion about how you'd like to spend the summer. Set an intention to establish a new stepfamily summer tradition. This is a good opportunity to share with your children and stepchildren what summers were like for you as a child. Those discussions are always fun! "You mean you played backseat bingo when you were driving to see grandma instead of watching a video?" your stepson asks incredulously. "Honey," you reply, "when I was a child, cars didn't have videos." "Wow!" he responds as though you'd just informed him you burned kerosene to light your house rather than using electricity.

In this issue, Marge Engel takes us on a bird's eye tour of SAA's international activities. Interest in stepfamilies is thriving in Great Britain, France, Italy, Brazil, Japan, and New Zealand.

Board member Debra Mogg offers insight into reviving a chapter that may be struggling. In Stepping with Faith, Ron Deal, MMFT discusses handling differences in faith between homes. Mary Siebe and Jim Hibbard in Stepping Up! tell us how their stepfamily learned to play together. We are pleased to introduce an article by SAA

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member and therapist, Meredith Bittner, M.A. about the challenges of stepparenting.

In the section for professionals you will find an article about Family Play Therapy by John Morse, M.S. and a research update by Kay Pasley, Ed.D. As always we are soliciting articles for publication. The next deadline is July 15th. Please fill our mailbox to the brim. We want to know what you are doing as well as how you are doing.

Have a banana Popsicle for me (one of my favorite summer memories) and enjoy your stepfamily during this all-too-brief summer season.

SAA FAMILIES

A Publication of The Stepfamily Association of America, Inc.

Editor: Jean McBride, MS, LMFT

The Stepfamily Association of America is a nonprofit educational organization founded in 1979 by Emily and John Visher to promote personal and family support through information, education and advocacy for stepfamilies. Stepfamilies is published quarterly by the Stepfamily Association of America, Inc. The publication is free to members of the Stepfamily Association of

America; nonmember institutions, \$50.00. Subscription orders, membership inquiries or questions concerning delivery should be sent to the Stepfamily Association of America, Inc., 650 J Street, Suite 205, Lincoln, NE 68508. Toll-free: (800) 735-0329 • Fax: (402) 477-8317 • Web sites: <http://www.stepfam.org> • www.saafamilies.org • www.saafamilies.com • E-mail: saa@saafamilies.com

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

MARGORIE ENGEL, MBA, Ph.D.

Family vacations – this one a frabjous* land/cruise Iberian Treasures tour to celebrate Poppie's 60th birthday! We prepared for the trip with a few travel handicaps: one cast (broken leg from ice skating accident), one knee brace (rear-ended by an out-of-control skier), a perpetual hobbler (destroyed knee in fall through a sidewalk manhole cover). It is a monumental feat of organization (and just plain luck) to be able to get 12 people – our five daughters and husbands, fiancé (now husband), and “adopted” daughter – together for more than a few days at a time.



For the most part, we pulled it off – although we flew from the US to Europe on three separate airlines. As stepmom, I had the dubious pleasure of holding a succession of barf bags for the daughter who threw up the entire flight across the Atlantic, compliments of a 24-hour contagious bug our grandchildren had brought home from school. Were we having fun yet?

With such a large group and always one member “under the weather,” we arranged to have a van and driver meet us at every stop. Parental delegation at work: each daughter was assigned one city to plan sightseeing activities.

We began our adventure with the enchanting Gaudi parks and architecture in Barcelona before a breath-holding ascent to mountain-top cliff-hanging Montserrat to hear the young choir boys' beautiful music.

Then on to the boat portion of the escapade and what was destined to become the favorite after dinner game – credit card roulette. Some of us offered dubious thanks to a son-in-law for the rules – owner of the last credit card remaining in the waiter's hand got the privilege of paying the bar bill for the entire table.

After a restful day of cruising along the Costa del Sol (Happy Hour remedied most seasickness), the first stop was Malaga. Then off to Gibraltar. The gimps took a taxi while the hardy donned helmets and hopped on motor bikes. Who knew The Rock was full of tunnels and caves (one a concert auditorium) and Barbary Apes scampering all over people?

And what a view of the harbor where Admiral Nelson's body was brought ashore after the Battle of

Trafalgar and Europa Point where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Mediterranean Sea!

Noite mágica 2000 finally arrived. Steve's wish had come true – to have all his girls with him to celebrate The Big One in the midst of yet another noisy dinner (we had already become known throughout the ship, by staff and guests, as The Family). All evening, Poppie was 60-years-old going on five!

The next morning, a drive through the Andalusia countryside took us to the Gothic Cathedral of Seville and a heated debate about whether Columbus' body was really in the sarcophagus. Took pictures of each of us standing beside it – just in case. A tour guide and driver strike prevented the trip to either Cordoba or the Alhambra from the Malaga gateway, so it was here that we got our first taste of buildings loaded with Spanish tile works – including many rooms in the Alcazar and the salon where Fernando and Isabel supposedly welcomed Columbus home from his trip to America.

When the ship docked in Lisbon, the smarty pants of the group decided he knew how to get us through narrow, twisting streets up to the turreted battlements of ancient St. George's Castle. Lots of griping as we wandered, more or less lost. Did finally get there. The bent-out-of-shape had cooled by morning and we boarded our van for the coastal route drive to Sintra where it was “Last Call” for tchotchkes.

We returned to the States toward the end of multiple snow storms that socked the northeast.

Those storms prevented the arrival of our cat sitter. After almost two weeks of fending for herself, our 15-year-old black Himalayan was full of hair matts and mangy, her large food bowl was empty, the scant remaining water in the water bowl had spots of mold on it, and the litter box was.....well, you can imagine.

Now, more than a year later, I have just spent a few hours down memory lane looking through the combination photo-album-scrap-book of the family trip. Cat Pandy seems fully recovered after her ordeal. Time has softened the irritation created by a few vacation squabbles between adult sisters. The album has too many photos with bug eyes – the kids wearing dark sun glasses. Almost every small group picture has different combinations of our children – they continually intermingled.

It was a playful time – with each other, the Barbary apes, Karaoke, chess, and (after the old folks went to bed) the slot machines. Oh, and did I mention the souvenir treasure – a professional stepfamily photo?

**frabjous (FRAB-juhs) adjective coined by Lewis Carroll in “Through the Looking-Glass;” perhaps meant to suggest fabulous or joyous.*

Stepfamilies International

continued from page 1

Representing France, Irene Thiery and Jacqueline Rubellin Devichi discussed their country's interest in "la familia ricomposte," a term coined by Irene in 1987. As in the U.S., the French survey only counts stepfamily households headed by a stepfather. In the 1950s-1960s, French stepfamilies tried various methods, including making children call stepparents "mom" and "dad," in an attempt to appear as a first family. By the 1970s, the thinking became more realistic and the French openly acknowledged stepparents as additional parents and not replacement parents. The French debate about stepfamilies surrounds the concept of multi-parenting so they look to other multi-parenting societies for guidance (for example, some of the African countries). Jacqueline pointed out that the primary legal attention goes to homosexual couples. France has addressed the issue of multiple moms and dads in these relationships by using a contract/proxy to acknowledge "de facto" parents without involving the absent biological parent. This may be a future solution for stepparent/stepchild relationships because adoptions are not allowed if the absent biological parent is still alive. The job of creating supportive laws and policies for stepfamilies in France is potentially more rapid than in the States. Irene works directly with the French government and is their designated speaker/advocate on behalf of stepfamilies. Family law in the United States is primarily based upon the laws of 50 individual states so the process is inevitably longer and more cumbersome.

Italy has two major societies: conservative with traditional mores in the south (south of Rome) while family life in the northern area more closely reflects the rest of Europe and the United States. There is an increase in the number of men and women with children who are living together following their respective divorces and those who do remarry create less complex stepfamilies. Italians are older at the time of a first marriage, have children later, and experience a longer divorce process. These factors mean that many remarried women are simply too old to have an "ours" child with the new partner. On the other hand, never married women form the largest group of second wives while divorced women more often simply live together with a new partner and do not remarry. As is true in the United States and France, Italy faces problems with regular payment of child support and fathers maintaining close contact with biological children who



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remain in the physical custody of their mothers.

Both France and Italy report that their largest source of stepfamily research comes from studies conducted in the United States. Many of their own stepfamilies refuse to participate in research because they are afraid of "breaking the equilibrium" established within their households. Research that has been conducted seems to mirror U.S. findings with regard to the psychological aspects of stepfamily living including children calling stepparents by their first name, confusion about discipline, ghosts of an "other," the need to be more flexible, and balancing losses with new resources. Cherlin's description of a stepfamily as an "incomplete institution" is well known and acknowledged.

The International Congress was financially supported by the University of Rome. As Scott and I were preparing to leave, a number of the Italian educators and therapists asked if we would be willing to come back and provide additional training programs on therapeutic intervention and stepfamily financial management. We agreed and the group is currently arranging the schedule and financing. SAA is delighted to share information and resources with international stepfamilies and the professionals who work with them.

BOOK REVIEWS

By PATRICIA SCHIFF ESTESS

For Fathers with Children from a Former Marriage

W

we can assume that a significant proportion of remarried men have children from a first marriage. What happens to the relationships of these fathers with these children?

Many of them evaporate, deteriorate, cool, or even become hostile. And that's a loss to both generations. The reasons are manifold. Custody arrangements can create distance between a father and his children. Society still questions the father's importance in a child's life and puts up obstacles to a close relationship. Fathers can slack off in their personal and support obligations to children, engendering anger and hurt in children. And custodial former spouses can play out their wrath of "father" by fostering a draconian image of him in children's minds.

For remarried dads struggling to strengthen the bonds with children from a former marriage, a couple of books are out that will help you understand what's happening and provide suggestions for how to once again become the parent you'd like to be.

Fathers' Rights by Jeffrey M. Leving
(Basic Books, \$14)

Leving, a Chicago matrimonial attorney, has been a long-time advocate of fathers' rights and of children's needs. In this book, he leads bewildered dads through the steps they need to stay involved in their children's lives. Readers learn now to find an effective and empathetic attorney, stay in control of their emotions during negotiations or mediations with a former spouse, protect the relationship with their children, and craft a shared parenting agreement (something he feels is especially important to maintain a relationship). His checklist of joint parenting considerations includes something not often contemplated – how the mother and father will adjust to growth and change – which includes an annual review of the children's needs and parents' circumstances, a procedure to modify any prior agreements, how they'll exchange educational and medical data, and how they'll handle any employment, residential and marital changes in their lives.

Although a real advocate of fathers' rights, Leving prefers an honorable peace with a former spouse than an all-out war. But if a war is necessary to preserve a father's relationship with his children, he provides advice for that as well. Throughout the book, however, he is cognizant of the trauma that divorce inevitably inflicts upon children, and provides strategies for fathers (which could also apply to non-custodial mothers) to help the kids through it.

WHERE'S DADDY: The Mythologies Behind Custody-Access-Support

by K.C.

(Harbinger Press, \$26.50)

This book focuses on the failure of the custody-access-support system which links a father's access to his children to the amount and regularity of financial support. While the author doesn't deny fathers' financial responsibilities, he explains that keeping fathers away if they do not meet all their financial obligations only increases the likelihood of single-parent families, children with lifelong abandonment scares, more deadbeat dads, very angry men, and women frustrated by the sole responsibility of raising kids.

If the book ended with the deconstruction of the custody-access-support system, it would languish in the archives of a university or social policy library. Its real strength is that it advocates co-parenting with a former spouse in a cooperative, but separate, way – not one that enmeshes you.

He has ideas for scheduling...and advocates flexibility since few lives slot in so conveniently to an every other weekend schedule – including kids' lives.

He talks about dividing responsibilities, not expenses. He says that parenting is about doing, and that paying for something is only the physical manifestation of the doing. Where you can split the responsibilities easily with a former spouse, he says, do. The responsibilities range from setting up and transporting to after school activities, buying clothes, taking charge of medical and dental care, religious activities, education, providing weekly allowance, and the like.

If contention exists, he suggests rotating the responsibilities. So for a year a mother may be in charge of medical care and a father of schooling. The next year they could switch responsibilities. It gets a little complicated and requires good negotiating skills, but he goes on to say that when you divide responsibilities, the exact amount of time spent with the children loses its significance. So does the amount of money spent.

While I hesitate to recommend a book where the author is not identified (*What's to hide?* I wonder), the book offers some ideas for rethinking the system.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Reviewer Patricia Schiff Estess's updated version of "Money Advice for Your Successful Remarriage" is now available through SAA. Call 800-735-0329 for it or for an updated catalog of all the other books SAA offers its members.

STEPPING UP!

By MARY SIEBE and JIM HIBBARD

Defining Summer Fun For the Family

After a long Colorado winter, our thoughts turn to having fun and enjoying our brief but beautiful summertime. As part of our growing together as a stepfamily, we learned that we came from different perspectives about what constituted having fun. When you include the kids, that made five different perspectives we had to consider when planning fun time together. Given that our children were teenagers when our stepfamily formed, we found that fun times weren't as centered around summer vacations as they had been in our first families.

JIM: In my first family, one of our primary fun activities was the annual camping trip with close friends. Each year we would spend time telling tall tales about the adventures of previous outings while creating more memories to recount in the future. All the children had grown up together and were still small enough to be interested in doing things with their parents.

MARY: When Jim and I got together, Jim's children were fourteen and sixteen. They were entering the age where doing things "together" meant being with their friends, not with us. My daughter and I, having been single for several years together, were used to having fun doing things that cost very little: hiking, backpacking, swimming, etc. By the time Jim and I got together, my daughter was grown but I still held on to the idea that we could enjoy simple times together as a stepfamily.

JIM: I remember our first camping trip together. Mary was an accomplished backpacker but was unfamiliar with camping in a trailer. While the kids were doing what they knew to do in the woods, Mary tried to keep track of them and what they were doing according to her style of camping. There were tense moments, like when my son built a huge campfire. Mary barely took her eyes off the forest ceiling, waiting for the conflagration to ignite.

MARY: It was hard for me to relax not knowing what the children had been taught about being in the outdoors. I felt responsible for children that were unknown to me.



Then, in the evenings as could be expected, the stories of former happy times camping as a family dominated most conversations. When I attempted to tell stories of my experiences, it was apparent that the kids weren't that interested in things that had nothing to do with them. It is regrettable that we were not able to connect in our mutual love of the outdoors.

JIM: Teenagers are difficult anyway, but when we were beginning our stepfamily, it was very hard keeping their attention focused on any meaningful interaction with Mary and me. We had some early successes when, as a family, we did completely new things together, like touring the north coast of California. All too soon, as the kids got older, they wanted to spend more time with their friends making their own plans for having fun. We began to look for the times when we had their interest, which usually involved going to a show or to dinner at a favorite restaurant. While it required us to be very flexible, we grabbed what spontaneous moments were available and had as much fun as possible being together.

MARY: Now that both Jim's children are grown and gone, we are finding more ways to have fun with the kids than ever before. It is one of the ironies of stepparenting for me – to have experienced such difficulties while the kids were growing up trying to make our stepfamily work and, when I let go, their love has come back to me in ways I could never have believed possible.

JIM: We had our ideas of what having fun together meant. And we had to be flexible and willing to redefine "fun" to make it work for our stepfamily, for our teenaged kids, and for ourselves. I am glad to say that no matter what we had to do to make it work, we were able to adapt and create fun times together as a stepfamily that we will recount and remember always.

Stepping with Faith

By RON L. DEAL

“I really want my two children to love the Lord and have a relationship with their father. But when they spend time with their dad and stepmom, they are exposed to a lifestyle that goes against what the Bible teaches. What can we do? I’m tempted to discourage them from going to see their dad.” Judy’s question is one I hear repeated around the country. All Christian parents want their children to grow in faith. But what can you do when the other household is leading the sheep away from the Shepherd?

Before I offer some ideas about faith training, let me address Judy’s temptation to limit the contact between her children and their father. While the desire to protect the faith of her children is understandable, becoming a barrier between the other biological parent and their children is not recommended. When this happens children grow to resent the parent who blocks parental access. In addition, the ex-spouse often feels cheated and may retaliate, exposing children to more conflict. You must find other ways of influencing your children. Here are some suggestions.

1. First and foremost, admit that you cannot control what is taught or demonstrated in the other home.

Too many people are still trying to change their ex-spouse, even after they’ve been divorced for years. (If you couldn’t change them in your marriage, what makes you think you can change them in your divorce?) Letting go of control forces you to 1) let God be in control of what you can’t change; and 2) make the most of your time with your children.

2. Influence your children toward the Lord, while in your home. All parents need to *model* the Christian walk and *impress* on their children the decrees of God (Duet. 6:4-9). But you will also have to *inoculate* them. Medical inoculations are controlled injections of a virus; this allows the body to develop anti-bodies that can combat a live virus, if ever encountered. Spiritual inoculations present viewpoints that oppose the word of God and then teach Biblical concepts that help children combat them. For example, discussing a TV program that glorifies greed and then showing children a spiritual view of money and stewardship.

Children who have one parent not living a Christian life will need inoculations to help them deal with an environment that is hostile to their growing faith. It is critical, however, that you remain neutral about the other parent; the inoculation cannot be a personal attack. A comment like, “Your father shouldn’t be lying to his boss – he’s so self-centered,” pulls on

children’s loyalties and burden’s them with your hostility. Ironically, it also diminishes your influence as they react defensively against your negativity. A more appropriate response is, “Some people believe lying is fine when it serves a purpose. But God is truth and wants us to be honest, as well. Let’s talk about that...”

3. You may have to endure years of prodigal living as your children try out the values of the other home.

This is a truth that many parents fear. Children may experiment with the “easier” lifestyle of the other home, especially during the teen years when they are deciding whether the faith they’ve been handed (“inherited faith”) will become their own (“owned faith”). Lovingly admonish them toward the Lord (not “away” from the other parent), and be close enough to reach when they turn around.

4. Pray daily for the strength to walk in the light and introduce your children to Jesus at each and every opportunity.

Your model is a powerful bridge to their personal commitment to Christ. Do all that you can to take your kids by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master (Eph. 6:4).

Next Issue: “How can I light a ministry fire under my minister?”

Ron L. Deal, M.MFT, is Family Life Minister for the Southwest Church of Christ in Jonesboro, Arkansas. He is a member of the SAA Advisory Council, a licensed marriage and family therapist, and author of the “Building A Successful Stepfamily” seminar (seminar schedule and articles at www.swfamily.org/stepfamily).

A Moment with Scripture

“...we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord...” (Ps. 78:4 NIV)

Children have a natural inclination to listen to stories. Be sure you tell your children and stepchildren your faith story, including how you came to know Christ, your faith peaks and valleys, and the influence of other people in your life. Let them see *and hear* how God has worked in your life.

Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.

(Micah 6:8).

FROM LARRY KALLEMEYN

A PAINLESS WAY TO DOUBLE YOUR GIFT TO SAA



The Stepfamily Association of America is very appreciative of every gift we receive to help support our efforts on behalf of stepfamilies. One way many of you can double your contribution to SAA is to request your employer match your gift. Many employers have matching gift programs but according to one recent report few employees actually take advantage of the opportunity. We encourage you to talk to your employer and ask that they match your gift to SAA.

Another method you can use to support SAA is to designate your United Way donation to the Stepfamily As-

sociation of America. Because SAA does not show up on your pledge card you will need to write our name and address on the card. Most United Ways throughout the country will honor your designation and will forward the funds to us.

If you or your employer or your local United Way have any questions just have them call us at 1-800-735-0329 or email us at saa@saafamilies.org.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Stepparenting – Walking the High Wire

By Meredith M. Bittner, LPC

“Yes, I’m willing to take the risk, to marry someone who has been through the trauma of divorce or death of their spouse. I will love the children as my own. I will care for them, help them to mature, punish when needed, complete their family unit.”

Even though the above thoughts and intentions are beautiful, everything is now in place for unrealistic expectations of being a stepparent. The farther apart reality and expectations are from each other, the rougher the road ahead. The reason for the discrepancy is simple - under most circumstances, the age and sex of the stepchild directly impact the relationship with the stepparent. Many times the stepparent’s expectations are not the same of the stepchild.

In actuality, this stepfamily will become a new family unit, very different from the one in which the children originally resided. The traditions and underlying unspoken fabric that had woven the original family together can be land mines for the newcomer. Many children view this new marriage as the final nail in their hope that their parents will get back together. Usually children can be selfish and self-centered. They look upon this interloper as someone who is now sharing their parent’s affection and quality time they had reserved for themselves.

As a counselor, I see many children who are unhappy and confused because their parent is dating and moving

on with their life after the divorce. Parents must continue to live an adult life! The good news is that through persistence and understanding, both the stepparent and child can form a new familial tie.

Stepparenting might be a different role than most assume it will be, however, it is an important one no matter what. Try to be an adult friend – someone the child can talk to who is not punitive, but concerned. Be a person who wants to “be there” for the child yet will still give them time alone with their parent (just as you want some time alone). Understand the complexity that occurs for children when they have too many authority figures directing them. When you have concerns, discuss them directly with your spouse. Listen to your stepchildren’s fears and problems about their parents without becoming emotionally involved.

Walking the high wire of stepparenting can be a daunting experience. Look for a net to support you. A neutral party like a counselor can help. Seek a professional who understands the process of becoming a stepfamily and can help the children understand their experience as well as support the adults as they develop their family.

Meredith M. Bittner is a licensed professional counselor in practice in Medford, New Jersey and member of the Stepfamily Association of America. Ms. Bittner is the parent of two children and stepparent of five children.

CHAPTER NEWS

By: Debra S. Mogg

Reviving a Chapter

Revive: 1) to return to consciousness; 2) to restore from a depressed, inactive or unused state; 3) to renew in mind or memory (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary)

Congratulations! You have taken the first steps in reviving your local SAA chapter to develop into a healthy, vibrant force in helping stepfamilies become more knowledgeable and supported in their unique family type in your community.

Your local SAA chapter is the heartbeat of SAA because it's located in the community, where stepfamilies live. The national board and local chapters are comprised of professional and lay individuals who have a passion for helping stepfamilies through the maze of stepfamily life. The following are suggestions that may help you to revive and develop active leadership for your chapter.

1. Identify the current board members. Call a special board meeting.
2. If you do not have a copy of your chapter's by-laws, request it for review prior to the meeting.
3. Review the requirements and qualifications of the current board members. Are they current members of SAA? This is important. Is the board diversified enough?
4. Identify the special interests of the board members (public relations/speaking, marketing, clinical issues, facilitators of support group, or "helper")
5. Obtain 10 prospect names from board members for potential board and/or committee members. Have a sample "invitation to join letter" prepared for review by the board members.
6. What are the demographics of your community? Is it possible to collaborate with another group in your community or nearby city to present programs? For example, a few years ago, the South Louisiana Chapter played an important role to bring in a national stepfamily speaker. Children's Hospital of New Orleans partnered with Slidell Memorial Hospital to host the event on a different night. Each hospital sought press coverage and did the advertising. The turnout was great and the cost was shared by each facility.

7. Community events?

- a. Health Fair or Bridal Show:** Contact the organizer of the event and request a stepfamily information booth. Get volunteers to staff the booth, pass out SAA brochures; talk to others about the many benefits of becoming a member of SAA, advantages they would receive from involvement in the local chapter, Stepfamily Day on September 16, Stepfamily Day Picnic, and information about support groups.
- b. Brown Bag Luncheon or Employee Assistance Program:** Contact businesses to see if this benefit is available to their employees. Offer to make a "free" presentation and have lots of SAA brochures to pass out!
- c. Churches, synagogues, YMCA:** Offer your assistance as a resource for educational programs about stepfamily life. If no program exists, offer the local chapter as a resource.

Good luck. The above suggestions, which are really just the beginning, do work. Our world can be changed one family at a time. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact the SAA office. We are glad to help. Let us know about your challenges, attempts and achievements. This column is going to be an ongoing part of *Stepfamilies* where we will offer inspiration, encouragement and a forum for chapter members.



StepFamilies In the News

St. Joseph (MO) News-press, April 15, 2001, "To Form a More Perfect Union: Family-based weddings one way to ease transition of remarriage." By Colleen M. Dorsey. "Marriage with children involved is more than just the joining of two people. It's a family commitment," said Dr. **Roger Coleman (SAA Board)**, who created the Family Medallion Ceremony 14 years ago. **Dr. Margorie Engel, President of the Stepfamily Association of America**, applauds the idea of the Family Medallion.

The Providence Journal-Bulletin, April 29, 2001, Sunday, All Editions, "Editor's Note" by Pam Thomas. "One of the trickiest times in a stepfamily's year is coming up: Mother's Day, followed by Father's Day...The **Stepfamily Association of America**, an advocacy and lobbying group, offers a Web site that has lots of information, advice, resources and even chat groups. For its categories, check the site map at www.stepfam.org."

Society for the Study of Social Problems, Anaheim, CA, August 17-19, 2001, "Stepfamilies Sessions I and II," moderator **Dr. Margorie Engel**. "High Conflict Triangle: The Big Bad Ex," presented by **Deena Stacer, MA, (SAA Board)** and "The Children of Divorced and Remarried parents: Reframing the Discussion," presented by **Anne Bernstein, PhD (SAA Clinical Committee and SAA Institute Faculty)**.

Chautauqua Institution, Chautauqua, NY, July 8-14, 2001, "When You Marry Again and Create a Stepfamily (With Children From Prior Relationships)," course presenters **Gloria and John Clark, PhD (SAA Pittsburgh Chapter Leaders)**, **Helen Devine, PhD (SAA Institute Faculty)**, **Jerry Devine, MA, LMFT (SAA Chair of the Board)**, and **Margorie Engel, PhD**.

The Fifth Annual Conference of the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education ("Smart Marriages, Happy Families"), June 21-24, 2001, **Diane Solle, Founder and Director (SAA Advisory Council)**. "The Stepping Together Program," presented by **Scott Browning, PhD; Jean McBride, MS; & Vannesa Henneke, MA (all SAA board members)**. "Love and Parenting in Stepfamilies," **James Bray, PhD (SAA Advisory Council)**. "Building a Successful Stepfamily: How churches Can Help," **Ron Deal, MMFT (SAA Advisory Council)**. "Divorce Law Reform: Building a Movement," **David L. Levy, JD (SAA Board)**. "Yours, Mine & Ours: Money in Stepfamilies," **Margorie Engel, PhD**. "Unburden the Clergy: Empower the Laity!" **Vannesa Henneke (SAA Board)**. "Stepmother Think Tank," **Vannesa Henneke, MA, Jean McBride MS**. "What Makes Marriage Enrichment Work?" **Bob Button, MDiv (SAA Advisory Council)**. "Stepfamilies: Playing for Keeps," **Jean McBride, MS**.

International Society of Family Law Conference, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, June 14-16, 2001. "How Stepfamilies are Undermined by Law and Public Policy," presentation by **Dr. Margorie Engel**.

13th National Conference of the Children's Rights Council, Washington, DC, May 3-6, 2001, **David Levy, President (SAA board)**. "Dads and Stepdads Parenting with Moms and Stepmoms," presentation by **Dr. Margorie Engel**.

www.abcchildrenfirst.com/talktokids.html, April 16, 2001, "Contrary to what many combined families would hope, stepfamilies are not just like other types of families," by Jeanne O'Brien Coffey.

– "Members of a stepfamily may never really love each other, but

they do need to respect each other," **Dr. Engel** says. "A stepparent is an additional parent, not a replacement parent, so stepparents need to recognize that they are in a supporting role – not the primary rule maker, but someone to be respected and deputized."

Columbia Daily Tribune April 10, 2001, Top Drawer Column

– **Lawrence Ganong (SAA Institute Faculty)**, professor of nursing and human development and family studies at the University of Missouri Sinclair School of Nursing, was presented with an award for his lifetime contributions to stepfamilies at the National Conference on Stepfamilies in New Orleans. Ganong and his MU colleague, Marilyn Coleman, professor of human development and family studies, were recognized for their extensive research over the past two decades on remarriage and stepfamilies.

The Record (Bergen County, NJ), April 5, 2001, "The Pressured Parent," by Mary Amoroso

– **Robert Klopfer (SAA board)**, a therapist with Stepping Stones Stepfamily Counseling Center in Ridgewood (www.stepfamilies.com), says the first thing a custodial parent must understand is that the child never really lets go of the parent who's gone AWOL. That parent is always there in the child's imagination.

The Dallas Morning News, April 4, 2001, Parent to Parent, "Stepfamily Relationships Take Special Care," by Beverly Mills and Betsy Flagler.

– As president of the **Stepfamily Association** and as the mother of two daughters and three stepdaughters, **Dr. Engel** has found what's predictable about how stepfamilies operate: "The first couple of years are chaotic."

The Buffalo News April 2, 2001, "Call a Truce in Stepfamily War," by Betsy Flagler and Beverly Mills

– "Who comes first?" This question, common in stepfamilies, backs the biological parent into a corner. "The stepfather's threat does nothing to solve the problem," says **Margorie Engel, president of the Stepfamily Association of America**. "They're a package deal. How that package is wrapped and unwrapped depends on how adults understand stepfamily dynamics and all the transitions."

The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, March 28, 2001, FAMILY CALENDAR

– Southwest Church of Christ in Jonesboro will hold a seminar on "Building a Successful Stepfamily" on Friday and Saturday. Topics include "God's Love for Stepfamilies," "Stages of Stepfamily Development," "Dealing with Ex-spouses" and "Helping Children Move Between Homes." **Ron Deal (SAA Advisory Council)**, family life minister at the church, will conduct the seminar.

Copley News Service, March 26, 2001, "Blending families," by Denise Sautters.

– In the book, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Stepparenting," Psychologist **Margorie Engel, president of the Stepfamily Association of America**, reports that by the year 2010, it is estimated there will be more stepfamilies than any other type of family in the United States.

University of Rome "La Sapienza," March 22-23, 2001, International Conference presentations. "The Plight of Children in the United States When Their Parents Divorce and Remarry: An Interdisciplinary Peek," by **Dr. Margorie Engel**. "Clinical Evaluation and Strategies to Assist Stepfamilies," and a workshop for "Stepfamily Therapy" by **Dr. Scott Browning (SAA Board)**.

The Washington Times, March 6, 2001, "Stepfamilies Must Work a Little Harder," by **Dr. Wade F. Horn (SAA Advisory Council)**.

BAStepfathers must R-E-S-P-E-C-T the uniqueness of stepfamilies. Making a success of a stepfamily is a more difficult proposition than succeeding as a first-time family. By recognizing the uniqueness of stepfamilies and the need to play by a different set of rules, however, stepfamilies can succeed and even thrive – no matter what statistics may say to the contrary."

WLS-AM Radio, Chicago, IL, Sunday, March 4, 2001, call in show hosted by Greg Button & Yvonne Greer discussing the joys and crazies of stepfamily life. **Debra Mogg (SAA Board)** interview.

The Washington Times February 20, 2001, "Limiting the sting of painful time," by Mark Stewart.

– Another thing divorcing parents can do to minimize the trauma for their children is to keep the divorce out of the courts as much as possible, says **David L. Levy (SAA Board)**, a lawyer who also is president of the Children's Rights Council in the District, an advocacy group that stresses children's rights to their parents.

The Idaho Statesman, February 13, 2001

– "I DIDN'T GROW UP TO BE A WICKED STEPMOTHER" (author **Marion Summers, SAA Board**) CLASS – 6 to 8 p.m. today at the Center for Stepfamily Development.

The Spokesman-Review (Spokane, WA), February 10, 2001, "Match play; Experts offer advice on bettering your chances in the search for that 'perfect someone'," by Jeanette White, staff writer.

– Don't underestimate the rewards of second marriages, say **Emily and John Visher**, who co-founded the **Stepfamily Association of America**.

The Times-Picayune (New Orleans) February 4, 2001, "Stepfamilies topic of lecture."

– **Debra Schilling-Mogg (SAA Board)** will be the guest speaker at the Life Resources Women's Night Out.

Chicago Tribune, February 1, 2001, "In Step with Home Life: Attaining balance is a tricky act for combined families," by Jacqueline Fitzgerald.

– **Engel's** advice to working members of stepfamilies: Find out what your company policies are with respect to step relations, from medical coverage to taking leave to care for a stepchild. Also look into your company's flex-time arrangements and see if your organization offers regular information on stepparenting, perhaps in the form of a newsletter.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON STEPFAMILIES media articles: USA TODAY, February 27, 2001, "Adult children prefer stepdads to stepmoms Adding a new woman to a family is more stressful, 20-year study finds," by Karen S. Peterson.

– In terms of being liked, "it is easier to be a stepdad than a stepmom," says sociologist and researcher **Constance Ahrons (SAA Advisory Council)** of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University....Her preliminary results were presented Friday at the **National Conference on Stepfamilies** in New Orleans.

America Online: Lifestep, Sunday, February 26, 2001, "Stepfamilies Need Advice, Support," David Crary.

BA major topic at the conference (**National Conference on Stepfamilies**) was the legal and financial problems facing stepfamilies. Speakers noted that most stepparents are – in the legal sense – strangers to their stepchildren, and thus need to take extra steps to ensure that the stepchildren are included in wills or health insurance plans. Other problems cited by speakers include school counselors and military officials unfamiliar with stepfamily dynamics, therapists wedded to "first family" models, and doctors unsure how much authority a stepparent has to approve major medical treatment for a stepchild.

SAA AT THE CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTE CHAUTAUQUA, NEW YORK JULY 9–13, 2001

*Chautauqua is a summer community dedicated to education
and recreation,
located between Buffalo and Jamestown, New York.*

TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED

- [Introduction to Stepfamilies](#)
- [Understanding the Remarriage Territory](#)
- [The Emotional Stages of Stepfamily Development](#)
- [Working Together as a Couple](#)
- [Money Management in Families Complicated by Divorce and Remarriage](#)

PRESENTERS

- [Margorie Engel, Ph.D., SAA President](#)
- [Jerry Devine, M.A., SAA Board Chair & Helen Devine, Ph.D., Marriage and Family Therapists](#)
- [Gloria Clark, B.A. & John Clark, Ph.D., Chapter Leaders](#)

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

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

PHONE # _____

Send Checks to: SAA, 650 J St., Suite 205, Lincoln, NE 68508
Or use your VISA or Mastercard and call 1-800-735-0329.

One Year Membership in SAA = \$40.00 (which includes the book, "Stepfamilies Stepping Ahead")



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