



SAA FAMILIES

A Quarterly Publication of the Stepfamily Association of America

Volume 20, Number 3

Fall 2001

Twenty Years of a Support Group

By JOHN W. CLARK

If you have been involved with a support group for stepfamilies you have probably seen attendance at meetings grow and decrease, watched “core groups” form and fade away and seen promising couples drop out after only one meeting. And you may have wondered if these things are typical. They certainly are typical of the group “Stepfamilies of Pittsburgh,” which is now in its 21st year of service. Its first meeting was in February, 1981, and it became a chapter of the Stepfamily Association of America in 1992.

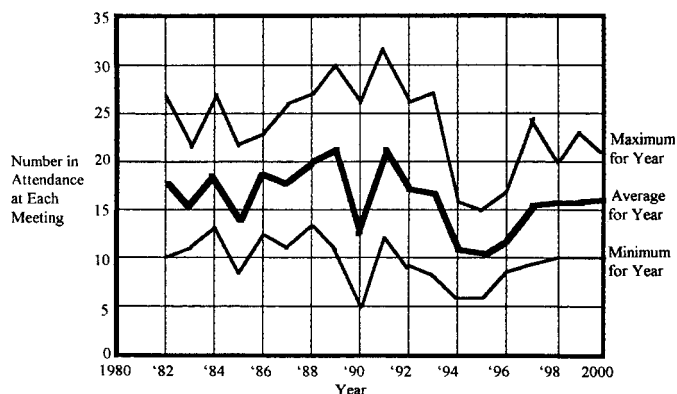
Fortunately, Stepfamilies of Pittsburgh has kept complete attendance records except for the first year, for which the archeologists have not been able to unearth the “sing-in sheets.” We thought it would be worthwhile to summarize these attendance records to illustrate what has happened with one support group over a period of years.

ATTENDANCE UPS AND DOWNS - The chart depicts the numbers of people who have attended the monthly meetings from 1982 to 2000. The group has met every month over that time except for three winter meetings that were

canceled because of weather and one summer meeting that was skipped before it was apparent that the membership wanted meetings every month. There have been a number of summer picnics, which were not counted as meetings. Also not counted are some children, ages 11 to 15, who came to a few meetings where we were able to separate them and provide their meeting with special supervision by a mental-health professional. Since the first meeting was in February, for the purpose of plotting the chart, the year was considered to extend from February of one year through January of the next.

Perhaps the most obvious feature of the chart is that attendance jumps up and down. In each year the maximum attendance at meeting was more than twice the minimum for that year. The time of year in which either the maximum or minimum attendance occurred was quite variable and did not seem to follow a discernible pattern. The biggest yearly drop-off was in 1990 when the hospital that very kindly supplies us with a meeting place decided that it could no longer mail out monthly meeting notices to each member, a free service they had provided for several years. (A “member” is defined as anyone who in the past year has come to a meeting or has expressed an interest by calling.) We have made up for this loss somewhat by increased telephone calls and occasional mailings but have not compensated completely. Note that there were three years – 1994, 5, and 6 – where average attendance was around 10 or 11.

THE GENDER GAP – The total attendance at meetings over the 19 years was 3627, representing 515 couples. It is often said that women attend more support group meetings than men. That is



STEPFAMILIES OF PITTSBURGH ATTENDANCE

continued on page 9

FROM THE EDITOR

By JEAN MCBRIDE, M.S., LMFT

By the time you read this newsletter, summer will officially be over, children will be back in school, and for many stepfamilies, life will settle into a familiar, predictable routine. If you listen carefully, you just may hear the barely audible sighs of relief from parents and stepparents finished with this year's tour of summer duty.

In this fall issue of Stepfamilies we look at what stepfamily life is like for the children. To that end, our President Marge Engel shares the hopeful results of her informal survey of adult stepchildren. Jim Hibbard and Mary Siebe continue the theme with comments from their three children. By the way, this is the last column from Mary and Jim who will be turning the Stepping Up! column over to Carri and Gordon Taylor. Thanks Jim and Mary and welcome Gordon and Carri! You will find a sample of Carri's style in her article about the Smartmarriages conference this year in Orlando, Florida entitled *Apples and Oranges*. Not to be left out, her husband Gordon offers his view of life as a stepdad.

Those of you who may be struggling to keep a support group for stepfamilies going, take heart from John Clark's article, *Twenty Years of a Support Group*. His primary message is to "hang in there!"

In his *Stepping with Faith* column, Ron Deal offers great suggestions for igniting a stepfamily ministry. Take this article to your own faith community, adapt the ideas and make them work for you.

Mark your calendars for the next Stepfamily Professional Training, October 5-6 in Chestnut Hill, PA. With Papernow, Pasley, Browning, Gamache and McBride, it's going to be an opportunity you won't want to miss. Check our web site for the details.

SAA FAMILIES

Inside This Issue

General Interest:

- From the Editor p. 2
- President's Message p. 3 & 8
- Twenty Years of A Support Group p. 1 & 9
- Book Reviews: p. 5
- Stepping Up!: What Kids Think p. 6 & 8
- Stepping With Faith p. 7
- Stepfamilies in the News ... p. 10
- Membership Application .. p. 12

Professional Section:

- Is Remarriage Good for Mothers and Their Children p. P1 & P4
- CLINICAL CORNER: Does Anyone Really Understand Me? The Child in the Stepfamily p. P2
- Apples and Oranges p. P3
- Building Healthy Stepfamilies: Training Conference p. P4

ISSN 0195-5969

CONTACT US
on the web at:
www.stepfam.org
www.saafamilies.org

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

Advertisements do not carry the endorsement of SAA.

© 2000 Stepfamily Association of America. Published quarterly in Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

MARGORIE ENGEL, MBA, Ph.D.

A necdotal information does not equal valid research. However, there are times when it is most helpful to simply listen instead of trying to quantify new beginnings – to get down in the trenches and hear about family values from those who are living them. That's why I asked a small group of adult stepchildren to talk about their perceptions and experiences. How delightful to hear a joyful noise!



Q: Tell me about the stepfamily myth versus your reality.

What's the myth? The wicked stepparent? I certainly don't have those. My reality is that I have four parents. Each parent and stepparent has a different personality and I have different relationships with each one – just like someone with two parents has a different relationship with Mom and Dad.

I think there is a lot less to the myth of the "terrible" stepparent these days than there used to be. Maybe I'm one of the rare ones who enjoys having a stepmother.

There is enough love for everyone. A stepfamily can be either an awkward, uncomfortable situation, or it can just be "the situation." I think having lots of friends in similar situations was helpful. Good or bad, having more than two parents was the norm for my crowd.

Q: Are there things that would have made the introduction of a stepparent easier for you?

Probably age. My stepmother came into the picture when I would have been difficult regardless of who or how she was. I was 12 and if I had been younger, it may have been less traumatic (but who knows) and it may have been easier if she had tried less to be my mother. Being older when my stepfather arrived was definitely a factor in his making an easier entrance into my life.

When my dad dated someone with younger children, I felt like I was being tossed aside for the new group. So, if the stepparent has younger children it makes a big difference. Also, when parents remarry and have kids with the new spouse, they need to make sure they don't blank out their older children.

My stepmother's children fell right in the age sequence of everyone in our family and that made it easier.

I like my stepparents more as I have gotten to know

them as people versus parents. I can relate to them more as adults and appreciate the struggles and joys they had to deal with when they took on the role of stepparent. Maybe it's because there is still a chance that at some point I will become a stepparent.

Q: What do you recall as being the biggest difficulty you had with your extended family?

Please tell parents not to bad mouth the other parent in front of the children. I was a victim of what I call "the ping pong effect." If my parents were in love when I was born, then I need for them to look at me and see the good times, not the bad times.

The only time I felt really mad was when my stepmom changed our normal Thanksgiving menu. Now we serve what everyone wants so we have a little from this family and a little from that family and Thanksgiving is great.

I need to buy more cards on Mothers Day and Fathers Day and keep track of more birthdays!

I incorporated my stepsiblings into my life relatively easily because I was still pretty young when they became family. Of course, I have closer bonds with some and I definitely feel more connected to my 'real' sib, but they are all my sisters - I could hang out with messy hair and no makeup, eat bonbons, and talk about boys with any one of them!

I am not particularly close to my older stepsisters but I think that is more of a personality issue than a stepfamily one. I wouldn't really consider any issues with extended family as "difficult."

It is important to respect all the other family members, too. Your stepsisters and stepbrothers might also have stepsiblings and half siblings in their other stepfamily and chances are everyone will get together for things like graduations and weddings. You might even be in family pictures together.

Q: Did you have much confusion dealing with "the name issue?"

I have no problem saying this is my dad and my stepmother. It is so common today to have four parents that people are not like, "Oh?" On the other hand, I'm an adult with children of my own and sometimes I do refer to my stepmother as "Mom" because she has been there for me in good times and in bad times.

I never felt uncomfortable introducing my stepparents by their first names. I am wondering what my children – whenever I have them – will call all of their

Continued on page 8

STEPPADS

By GORDON TAYLOR

Stepdads and Teenage Stepchildren *Leaders, or just wanderers in the wilderness?*

The role of stepdad is daunting, assuming you can even define it. When I remarried, I gained a 14-year-old stepdaughter after having lived first with three brothers and then three sons. Common sense would dictate that this would be a different experience. Little did I know just how different it would be!

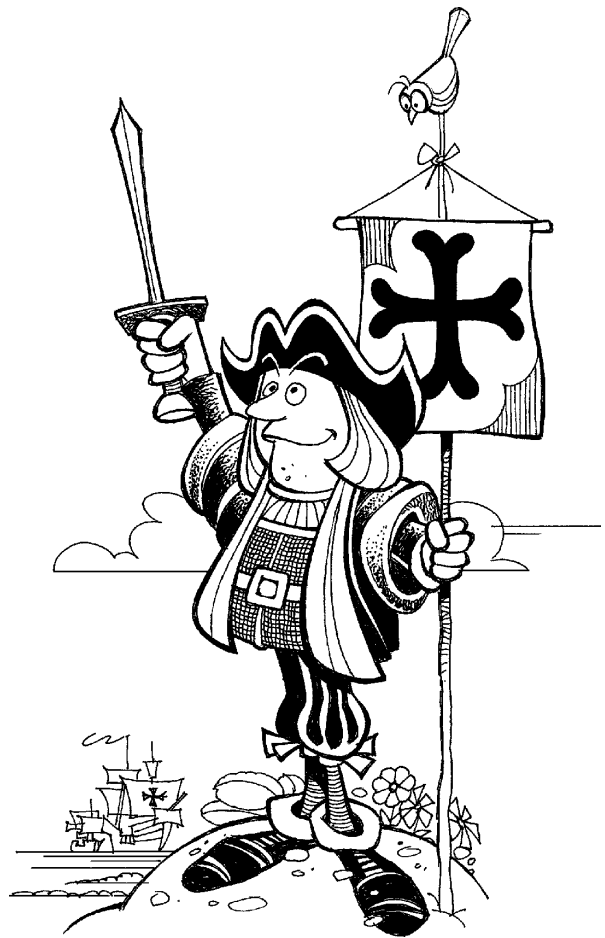
First, I “conveniently” forgot all the parenting mistakes I’d made in my first marriage and launched into stepparenting with an enthusiastic naiveté that died less than a month after the wedding.

Parenting is *very* different in the stepfamily. I learned quickly that my role was to back up my wife in parenting her daughter, not to lead this family out of the wilderness. I soon realized that if you’re leading and no one is following, you’re just out for a WALK!

I experienced the fragility of the stepparent/stepchild relationship and how its formation is a barometer for determining how fast the new family is forming. When I was driving all over our hometown looking for a runaway I experienced how devious (smart) teenagers can be. Many years later it was revealed to me that *I* was the one under surveillance as I drove around looking for her. Yes, she had me spotted the entire time!

It took approximately five years before we experienced and understood (trusted) each other enough for our relationship to solidify and really bloom. My stepdaughter was my “living laboratory” in which our experiments taught me about personality styles (ours were opposite), gender differences (again opposites), and most of all communication and conflict resolution skills.

If you are forming a stepfamily with teens, don’t even try to be a parent/stepdad at first. Come into the relationship as a friend and support for a child who may be lost and hurting. The most productive role for a stepdad is that of a “servant leader.” As



Stephen Covey said, “Seek first to understand and then be understood.” Don’t forget to educate yourself and be willing to seek counsel. Good luck.

Gordon Taylor is a licensed M.F.T. in California. He is married to Carri Taylor, who is a Certified Communication Skills Trainer and Personal/Executive Coach. They speak nationally on “Stepfamily Issues & Development” as well as other relational topics. For more information visit their website at www.cgtaylor.com.

BOOK REVIEWS

By PATRICIA SCHIFF ESTESS

As I was reading “This Is My Daughter” (Scribner Paperback, \$13) a novel by Roxana Robinson, I wondered if the tension I felt in my stomach was due to the compelling struggles of the central characters, Emma and Peter, as they tried to create a new life and family together after their failed first marriages ...or something else. When I finished the book, I realized it was more. From personal experience, I recognized the imminent danger the couple was facing. At any time in their fragile remarriage, the pieces could begin crumbling and the union could collapse into rubble.

Peter and Emma are wealthy, highly educated, and sophisticated New Yorkers who are well suited to each other and deeply in love. But neither privilege nor commitment offers any protection from their daughters who grieve the loss of their earlier lives or from a former wife who subtly and not-so-subtly, has never stopped blaming Peter for having walked out.

What makes the novel more than a daytime soap though, are the real dramatic conflicts inherent in remarriage. Husbands and wives caught between loyalties to each other and their children. Exes who, though not necessarily likeable, are understandable. And children who are resentful, confused, and helpless participants in their own lives and this new union.

Because this is a novel, it takes a dramatic event for Emma and Peter to come to a deeper understanding of what their relationship means to them, where they've erred in trying to forge this new family, which of their expectations were unreal, how their own frailties played into the problems, and how kids can be isolated by divorce and remarriage. They don't really realize all this in their day-to-day struggles.

As remarrieds, we might not either. But as voyeurs peeking in at someone else's problems, we have the benefit of distance and the vision of a wide perspective. So this fictionalized story helps us better understand our own lives. We spot the dangers and mistakes as the action unfolds. At any point in the story, we could probably put down the book and ask a character to think about how he or she could have reacted differently to change the outcome.

So the novel becomes instructive — without meaning to. As readers, we forgive ourselves our mistakes because we see other good people in similar situations make mistakes as well. We are more forgiving of defiant children because we see that remarriage isn't as simple as two loving people marrying and bringing

their children into the fold. And we conjure up ways to maneuver around highly-charged situations somewhat more effectively.

The novel is also hopeful. One of Robinson's reflections struck me as especially insightful: It was brave to be independent, but braver still to engage.

Finally, **This Is My Daughter**, is engrossing and well written. This is a notable book, both on the New York Times' list and on mine.

THIS IS MY DAUGHTER

by: Roxana Robinson

Scribner Paperback, \$13.00

I don't know how you'd get **STEPLIVING FOR TEENS** by Drs. Joel D. Block and Susan S. Bartell (Price Stern Sloan, \$4.99) into a antagonistic pre-teen or teen's hands, but try. It's a wonderfully honest guide to getting along with stepparents, parents and siblings. Maybe a guidance counselor, therapist, or trusted adult can suggest (or even give) the book to the child. It's a gem.

The authors are empathic to young peoples' plights. They offer a variety of excellent suggestions for dealing with specific situations and emotions that teens and preteens may be facing, such as not wanting to take orders from a stepmother, resisting changes in how the household runs, a stepparent favoring her own children, their own jealousy over dad's time with stepkids, a stepparent's trying too hard to be nice, a mother's complaints that dad doesn't give her enough money for the kids, having a serious crush on a stepsibling, and more. But while the authors, both psychologists, offer suggestions on how young people can take greater control of their lives, they are also realistic. Not all situations have solutions. Things might not always go the way the teen wants, and short of something illegal, immoral, or dangerous happening to them, the authors understand that though the young people might be able to make the stepfamily a more comfortable place to live, it isn't always the perfect situation.

STEPLIVING FOR TEENS

by: Drs. Joel D. Block and Susan S. Bartell

STEPPING UP!

By JIM HIBBARD and MARY SIEBE

What the Kids Think

MARY: In the past year, we've shared the good and the challenging experiences we have had in being in a stepfamily. Our column has reflected how Jim and I viewed stepfamily life, not how the kids viewed it.

JIM: It's funny how easy it is to go through life thinking *my* perspective is *everyone's* perspective. Mary has certainly shown me the fallacy in that! But I think I didn't ask the kids what they thought partly because I was afraid to. We've worked hard to create safety and respect within our stepfamily for almost nine years. Now that things are going well, I still didn't want to rock the boat.

MARY: *You* didn't want to rock the boat! I was terrified that if we asked the kids what they thought, I would hear what I had so often interpreted from their behavior: that they just didn't like me or want me around.

JIM: Just getting the kids' perspectives together for this article was a logistical challenge. My son is visiting from Japan, my daughter is in Vail for the summer and Mary's daughter is in the San Francisco Bay Area. Communication, the bane of every stepfamily, was again an issue causing the kids to scramble to finish putting their ideas together at the last minute.

MARY: So (gulp!) here is what our children want to share about stepfamily living, from *their* perspectives.

JACY (Jim's daughter, age 22; thirteen years old when the stepfamily was created):

What seemed to me like seconds after the divorce, Dad started dating. Soon after that Mary moved in and I instantly disliked her. At thirteen years old, I was bitter about this "new lady" intruding on the bachelor lifestyle that we were living. As time went on, the fake smile I was carrying around wore off and the "stepfamily" didn't seem anything like a family at all. However, I began to grow more mature and realized that this was how things were going to be. Oddly enough, the family seemed to grow closer as my brother and I went off to college. Today I can't imagine life any different. Mary's entire family has become a large part of my life and Mary is a great friend and confidante. I feel lucky to have such wonderful people in my life.

CRAIG (Jim's son, age 24; fifteen years old when we became a stepfamily):



I believe that my experience as a member of a stepfamily has been a very positive one. Of course, it took some compromises and adjustments to make it all work out. But, that's life: making the most of and enjoying the hand that is dealt to you. I often wonder what direction my life might have taken without the influences of my stepfamily members. I consider myself lucky to have not just one family to love and support me but having two is a true blessing.

JAMIE (Mary's daughter, age 32; twenty-three, grown and living independently when stepfamily formed):

I have to say, that the upside of going through a painful divorce (or two) with your parents is getting through it and gaining stepparents. Although the initial adjustments were rough for me with both my stepfather Pat (Mom's second husband) and my stepmother Maureen (my Dad's second wife), I came to love them both very much. They each balanced out my respective parents in ways that were mostly helpful in raising me. No, it was not Nirvana; there were times when I wished one or both of them gone. But, in the end, I don't think I could have chosen two people to love or love me more. I certainly would not be who I am today without their involvement in raising me. As an adult, I also feel blessed to have a third stepparent, my second stepfather Jim. Although he did not raise me, I

Continued on page 8

Stepping with Faith

HOW CAN I LIGHT A MINISTRY FIRE UNDER MY MINISTER?

By RON L. DEAL

Reaching out to stepfamilies is sure to be a major area of ministry for the church over the next millennium. But persons often ask, “How do we get started and how do we get our minister to put this on his agenda?” It is an important question.

It is my estimation that most current stepfamily ministry in America today started as a grassroots effort by a few stepfamily couples. Very few formal stepfamily ministries are run by a paid ministry leader. Furthermore, no major pro-family Christian organization is putting time or resources into this aspect of family life—at least not yet — so church leaders are not being made aware of the need. So what can you do?

First, realize that your pastor and church leaders are constrained by time. They have a lot on their plate and very few resources to help them take on another project. It is also good to acknowledge that most ministry leaders have little knowledge of the unique dynamics and struggles stepfamilies face. Furthermore, pastors can become hesitant to pursue stepfamily ministry due to theological issues surrounding divorce and a hidden fear that ministry to remarried couples somehow abandons God’s ideal for one man and one woman for life. You must be able to help them with each of these concerns. Consider it your challenge to educate them in a number of ways. Here are some suggestions:

- 1. Gather a few stepfamily ministry resources and become familiar with them.** Eventually you’ll meet with key ministry leaders and you’ll need to make some recommendations. You can contact SAA for some suggested resources.
- 2. Develop a vision for stepfamily ministry.** Grasp hold of the potential impact on your community as you divorce-proof remarried couples and equip them to serve the Lord. Stepfamily ministry is not a passing fad; it is here to stay.
- 3. Get a game plan.** I usually recommend that before a ministry is launched at least two couples spend some time gathering resources and studying about stepfamily life. If there is going to be a class or support group, you won’t need to know all the answers, but you will need to know how to facilitate some constructive discussions. Ask for a small budget to advertise your new ministry and gain public support from the pulpit.
- 4. Share your vision and your game plan with your lead minister.** Demonstrate the ministry need and potential impact with statistics and capture his attention

with how you intend to help (download the article “Ministering to Stepfamilies” from my web page). Don’t ask him to run the ministry for you (unless he happens to offer), just seek his blessing and support.

- 5. Start!** Begin meeting with a few others and share your ideas for strengthening your homes. Using a book or study manual as the backbone to your discussions, have group members read a section before each session. Then come prepared with discussion questions to make the material come alive for your participants.

SAA continues to educate ministers about the needs of stepfamilies. But until those seeds begin to take root, beginning a stepfamily ministry is probably in your hands. Don’t stand back and wait for someone else to do it. Why don’t you make it happen!

Submit your questions about Christian stepfamily living to be addressed in future articles to Ron at rdeal@swfamily.org.

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 a forthcoming book for stepfamilies from Bethany House (seminar schedule and articles at www.swfamily.org/stepfamily).

Thank you

for your ongoing support. Your United Way donation is a wonderful way to give support to the Stepfamily Association of America. Most United Ways throughout the country will honor your designation when you write our name and address on your pledge card. They will forward the funds to us. Many employers have matching gift programs which will allow you to double your contribution. 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@sasafamilies.org.

President's Message

Continued from page 3

grandparents.

You adjust, you accept, you love and you learn to call adults by their first names. I call them my stepparents and I introduce them to others by the same name I call them. Being an adult makes that easier because it is normal to address people by their first name. In fact, it's funny for me to call people by Mr. or Mrs. now, even when it may really be the most appropriate thing to do. I guess maybe that's not so good...

Q: How would you describe the role of a stepmother?

I think I was accepting of another person, not a Mom replacement, but another person to nurture me – to listen and not just preach. Stepmothers definitely should not try to replace the mother. When they do, they lose.

My stepmother didn't come into our family to take over. She was there for us when we needed her guidance and understanding but she also backed off (and still does) when things need to be handled between dad and us.

Stepmothers need to come into the family with the reality that this is not going to be the Waltons. I think a lot of women try too hard to be the stepchildren's best friends.

Q: The media portrays stepfamilies as a problem for children. Do you feel there are any advantages to being in a stepfamily?

I believe that the more people you have looking out for your well-being and the more people in your corner the better. It's like I have two extra family members if I ever need them – and I usually do!

My stepfamily has given me a better understanding of what I might face if I ever become a stepparent or my children need to adapt to a stepparent. I don't think it means I wouldn't make mistakes, just different ones.

The bottom line is that I feel blessed. I have a big family and I feel loved by everyone in it.

E-mail us with your e-mail address

so you can receive our monthly

stepfamily news updates.

saa@saafamilies.org

What Kids Think

Continued from page 6

feel very close to him and love him as much as the other two. He has taken my husband I into his heart and it is such a joy now to watch him be a grandpa to our daughter Emma! My husband and Jim share a special father/son-in-law relationship: they frequently call each other on the phone for advice and "atta boy" chats. And, through Jim, I got a step brother and sister! Because I was on my own when Mom and Jim got together, I enjoy having more and more of a relationship with Jacy and Craig as they get older.

All in all, stepparents have been a true blessing in my life, even if it means buying a few more Christmas presents every year!

JIM: It is interesting that, as the kids grow up, it is possible to have a more honest adult relationship with them. Sometimes it surprises me because, hey, I'm the Dad and that role is hard to give up. And sometimes I just step back and marvel at these wonderful people in my life.

MARY: I still maintain that stepparenting was one of the hardest things I have ever done. And, I can truthfully say that the rewards earned by sticking through the hard times and working together to solve the unique challenges of stepfamily living have been tremendous for us as a couple and as a stepfamily, and definitely worth the risk and the effort.

JIM: Over the past year, we have shared many of our stepfamily stories with you that we hope have inspired you to think about your stepfamilies in different ways. Now we feel it is time for others to give their perspectives on stepparenting. Even though this is our last column, we intend to write future articles on topics relevant to stepparents and those who work with them.

MARY: We have really enjoyed sharing our experiences with all of you. And I know that you will enjoy Gordon and Carrie Taylor who I recently met at the Smartmarriages Conference. I felt an instant kinship with them as stepparents meeting their family's challenges with intelligence and humor. So take care, all of you. Keep stepping up to the joys and challenges in your stepfamily lives. Until next time....

Editor's note: This is Jim and Mary's last column of Stepping Up! With the winter issue we welcome Gordon and Carrie Taylor who will be sharing their stepfamily adventures!

Twenty Years of a Support Group

(continued from page 1)

true for Stepfamilies of Pittsburgh, but the gap is not large. Fifty-six percent of those attending were women, 44 percent men. By far the majority of people attending meetings came as couples. Eighty-two percent of the people who attended were accompanied by their partner. Fifteen percent were woman attending alone and three percent were men who were by themselves. It appears that women often attended a meeting alone first, then reported to their partners that it was safe to come because, yes, there were other men there.

LENGTH OF ATTENDANCE – We were interested in how long couples kept coming back. How many meetings did they attend before they felt they had enough information – or perhaps became bored with the meetings? For this purpose we counted a couple as attending a given meeting regardless of whether it was one or both partners attending. The average length of attendance was 4.1 meetings extending over 9.3 months. Possibly more meaningful numbers are obtained by omitting the three couples who have shepherded the group and have attended most of the meetings, two couples for all twenty years (Wilma and Lincoln Wolfenstein, Gloria and John Clark) and one for the last ten (Joan and Jack Musher). With this adjustment, the average number of meetings attended per couple was 3.2 over a span of 8.3 months.

ONE-TIME VISITORS – Perhaps the biggest surprise of this review was the discovery that about half of the couples who attended came to only one meeting. The proportion of people who don't return has not decreased over the years as we would have hoped. In fact, 48 to the first 100 couples who came to meetings did not come back whereas 64 of the 100 couples came only once. These figures tell us that we should make a greater effort to welcome first-time visitors. One step will be that we will make up a "newcomers packet" containing basic information about stepfamilies to give to first-time members. But in our more sanguine moments we like to think that the people who came only once got what they needed in one meeting, found that their problems were neither unusual nor insurmountable, and lived happily ever after.

The couples who returned after their first meeting tended to come back for many more meetings. Their presence masked the fact that so many were not returning after one meeting. Going back one more time to the

average number of meetings attended per couple, if we do not count those who came just once and also the three couples who have come fairly continuously, the average couple who attended more than once came to 6.0 meetings extending over 17.2 months. Of course, many couples have attended for a longer period of time to provide support to new stepfamilies or older families who have just realized that they need help.

Among the couples who have attended Stepfamilies of Pittsburgh meetings there have been several marriages and a number of babies born. At least one couple who were planning marriage before attending meetings decided against it, but many such couples eventually married and found that they were able to avoid pitfalls by having more realistic expectations. A lot of couples have said that Stepfamilies of Pittsburgh saved their marriage by giving them the opportunity to talk to others who are "in the same boat," encouraging them to "hang in there" and showing them that participation in a stepfamily can be a very rewarding experience.

Stepfamilies of Pittsburgh is still meeting monthly and supporting stepfamilies. We hope this report will encourage others to keep their support groups going – you can help a lot of people.



Become a Member of SAA

Help us pass the word about the benefits of joining SAA. Share this newsletter with a friend and encourage him or her to become a member of SAA. We are looking to double our membership over the next few months and we need your help.

StepFamilies In the News

RK Radio, St. Paul, MN, August 15, 2001. "Ruth Koscielak" show with Maggie Kelly asking for SAA's position on the Princeton research discussed in the July 29, 2001 Minneapolis Star Tribune article. **SAA President Margorie Engel** discussed the disconnect between law, policy, and the way parents and stepparents care for their children. Specific recommendations for change were proposed.

Minneapolis Star Tribune, Sunday, July 29, 2001. "Are Stepmoms Blocking Youngsters' Medical Care?" by H. J. Cummins. A careful reporting of the legal, financial, practical, and emotional complications that prevent easy answers to this question including information from **SAA President Margorie Engel** about the association's general policy goal of "lifelong recognition of the stepparent and stepchild relationship."

Good Morning America, July 31, 2001. "Divorced Parents and Stepparents Working Together for the Children." **David Levy (SAA Board and president of the Children's Rights Council) and SAA president Margorie Engel** talk about the difficulties of parents and stepparents working together and importance of overcoming them - with special praise for the parents who do this work.

News Radio 1200, WOAI, San Antonio, TX, June 20, 2001. Drive-time radio host Bob Guthrie talks with **SAA president Margorie Engel** about the parenting time crunch for dads with both biological children and stepchildren.

USA Today, June 17, 2001, "Make Room for Co-Daddy: Father and stepfather work to keep the kids grounded,"

by Tim Friend. Writing about empathy as the key ingredient for the two dads to work together, Friend interviews **SAA President Margorie Engel and David Levy (SAA Board and CRC President)** about evidence that more bio parents and stepparents are empathizing with and supporting each other.

Newsday, June 5, 2001, "Joint Occupancy: The agony of living together while going through a divorce," by Denise Flaim. **Margorie Engel, President of SAA**, says "concerns over how children will cope prompts many couples to live together - as cordially as possible, for as long as possible."

Newsday, June 5, 2001, "Divorce New York-Style Isn't Fair to the Children," by Susan Cheever. "It's tougher to get joint custody in some states than in others, and New York is one of the toughest," says **David Levy (SAA Board and president of the Children's Rights Council)**.

Oakland Tribune, May 13, 2001, "Steps for Stepmoms," by Monique Beeler. Positive stories for Mother's Day about the stepmom experience.

NBC's Today show, May 25, 2001, "Etiquette for Weddings over 50." Matt Lauer interviews **Dr. Margorie Engel** about her book, *Weddings A Family Affair: The New Etiquette for Second Marriages*.

Bankrate.com®, May 29, 2001, "See a financial planner before walking down the aisle again," by Dana Dratch. Discussion with SAA about protecting assets prior to a second marriage.

StepFamily Day 2001 Placed on the Congressional Record!

On Sunday, September 16, the Family 2001 did arrive! Endorsed and recognized throughout the 4 years in 38 states. The Third National Stepfamily Day picnic recognizes and celebrates Stepfamily Day. Communities endorse this event with festivities, food, games and door prizes. Last year, over 1100 cities across our nation celebrated with a picnic.

Senator Debbie Stabenow from Michigan has this year placed Stepfamily Day on the Congressional Record in Washington D.C. giving all 50 states the "go ahead" to celebrate a National Stepfamily Day through the Stepfamily Association of America. What a victory this is for American stepfamilies.

For more information, contact Christy Borgeld, Coordinator - Stepfamily Activities and founder of Stepfamily Day - christyb37@home.com.



The Dream Vacation

by Carol Thompson

Summer Time,
Sunshine, Vacation Time.

I just can't wait,
to sit by the lake.

With my fishing pole in one hand,
and lots of lemonade at my command.

Or maybe I'll get to see the mountains so high,
climb to the top, kiss the sky.

I'd like to go to the North Pole to see Santa Claus,
Rudolph and the elves, just because.

Or maybe take off to Disney World in Orlando,
See Mickey, Minnie, and old Pluto.

A trip to the zoo would be so great,
to see the pandas, giraffes, and apes.

I could hang out at the local pool,
Take a dip just to get cool

The ball park is a good place to go.
See the Braves play, they'll win you know.

I could go to the movies, watch a show,
Eat popcorn, Raisinettes, and drink a Coke real slow.

I might head out for the park,
Feed the birds for a start.

I could walk down to Carter's pond,
and pick some flowers for my new stepmom.

I could make a grass skirt and a lei for me,
And fly on down to Hawaii.

Or I could go to Georgia, Texas, or Idaho,
How about Alaska, Maine, or Mexico?

I could go shopping at the mall,
Or stay home and do nothing at all.

I could go visit my stepmom's family,
I wonder if they will like me?

I might get in a bus and see the Great Lakes,
Or play in the backyard and look for snakes.

Museums and monuments I could see,
If I could just fly to Washington, D.C.

"Wake up, wake up son," I hear. "It's the first
day of school."
Oh how could I have been such a fool!

I thought it was vacation time.
It was only a dream. It's August 29th!



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")



STEPFAMILY ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

650 J Street, Suite 205
Lincoln, NE 68508

Address Correction Service

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lincoln, NE
Permit No. 1147