Single Mothers

by Andrea Bowen and Judith Broadhurst

Being a mother is no easy task, but the job becomes much more difficult when you are both "mommy and daddy," when there is no father around to share the responsibilities and even the rewards of parenting. Emotional stability and maturity are essential to coping with the single-parent role.

"The single mother needs to get in touch with herself. She needs to realize that she does not have to meet all the needs of her child or children. Friends or support groups are most helpful," emphasized Bette Graham White, former mayoral candidate and mother of a 19-year-old son.

Mother of seven and owner of a bicycle shop, Joyce Boone echoed White’s views. "Any woman married or single or divorced needs to find her own personal identity."

Getting in touch with her emotions was difficult for Grace Ramirez Moore, mother of four children ranging in ages from 15 to 3½ years. "I knew long before my 3½-year-old twins were born that my marriage was not steady. But, by the time my husband and I separated, our family size had doubled," Moore explained.

"I just fell apart emotionally. I did not want the separation, it was all my husband’s idea. Realizing that the only way to make my family work was to take one day at a time helped me cope better," she continued.

Moore’s separation which is ending in divorce was like a death to her. "I went through the whole death process, the same as I would have if my husband actually had died. I grieved and mourned, but I am over that now."

Friends or relatives are another important ingredient in making a single mother’s role more bearable and even enjoyable.

"The best thing a single mother can do is to have a lot of friends who will listen to her problems and help her with baby-sitting or running errands," advised Gloria Guardiola, mother of 5-month-old Robert Alexander.

Guardiola, assistant director of the Association for the Advancement of Mexican-Americans, and psychologist Jeanne Zell, mother of 18-month-old twins, needed friends’ help because they elected to go through the pregnancies alone without the children’s fathers.

Even though each was somewhat surprised to find out about the pregnancies, both women were delighted. "When I found out that I was expecting, I was happy. I never thought once about ending the pregnancy. There was no reason to, I was older, 37, and felt secure in my life," stressed Guardiola, an avid worker for rights for women and Mexican-Americans.

Zell, equally thrilled to be pregnant, smiled, "I read and reread The First Nine Months of Life and other books on in- fant development, and kept imagining the baby, stage by stage, growing inside of me."

A single friend of Zell’s volunteered to be her coach for the LaMaze method of prepared childbirth. That friend also was at the hospital with her when the babies came two months ahead of schedule, thus ending Zell’s course in prepared childbirth.

"Since I work and sometimes not regularly, I have to depend on friends to take care of my son. When he is ill, I often call them to go get some medicine for me," Guardiola explained.

Struggling off one’s pride enough to ask others for help was extremely hard for the community-involved White.

"When my son and I moved to Houston 13 years ago, I finally admitted I needed some kind of support and help to try to learn how to be a mother and a leader in the community," commented White.

A church community in the east part of Houston was the answer to her immediate problems. It helped alleviate all the pressures of raising a child by herself and allowed her time to go back to school and obtain a bachelor’s degree in theology.

After securing the much needed help of the church, the young mother and her son moved on their own—and White worked in the administration office at the University of Texas.

"I sent Troy to private school at St. Anne’s partly because we had been living in a sheltered environment and also because the school had an excellent sports program—my son always loved sports," she said.

Having a male role model is a concern expressed by single mothers. The recreation program at Troy’s school helped give him a male figure, much to her worries about Benjamin, one of her twins, growing up without a man around.

"I seriously am considering looking into Big Brothers to help with a male influence. My son-to-be ex-husband helps financially and helps out with the children, but I worry, calls them or comes to see them. Benjamin has no male figure," stated Moore who is an aide to state representatives Lance Landrum and Jack Bell.

Guardiola also feels the need to expose her infant son to many other people. She also has taken the day when he, too, will need a male role model.

While her son’s father has never cast eyes on the baby, Guardiola struggles not to be bitter. "I have tried to keep a positive attitude toward my son’s father. I never want him or my son to say that I kept them from seeing each other. I also hope I never pass my negative feelings about the father onto my child," she reflected.

Zell’s feelings about the father of her twins fluctuates from fondness to bitterness though he has not been around to share either. "I’ve become more aware of how other men view themselves as parents and their relationships with their children. It has become a new test, what kind of parent would he be? It helps filter people out of my unnecessarily limited social life. The people who are truly tolerant and able to hang in there are more my kind of people."

"I have my own fears of disciplining my children and about how a child should be reared. I do not know if I could have the man impose his values and discipline on my children," she added.

"I do not see marriage as a solution, but as a meaningful relationship. I would never marry just to give my children a name. If I ever decide to marry I want it to be because I will be getting a better way of life."

When asked if she would ever marry again, Moore quickly replied, "Oh, yes. I know that I can find someone who I have to, but there is a great deal to be said for marriage."

Zell, even though she adores her young- est twin, also wants to become part of a single parent. "It is difficult. I emphatically favor the two-parent-in-residence family with the mother and father, intentional families also being important."

The mothers of older children, Boone, White and Moore also agreed that even though their divorce and being reared by a single parent have had an effect on the youths.

"I do not think about our situation much, I know that it bothers them. In 20 years or so I’ll be able to say if our divorce and my raising them had a good or bad effect," commented Boone.

White and Moore feel that it has made their offerings more mature and knowledgeable about love relationships.

"My oldest daughter, Chela, is far more mature about friends and children than I was at her age," Moore said.

If any of these women could tell another similar story, they would agree that it would be better to their marketable skills.

"If a woman stays in the job market, I firmly believe that she is more secure in her role as a wife and mother and has contributed. Women should develop skills and at least try to work part-time at a job or volunteer work. A woman does not need to be a woman should not let her whole life revolve around her husband."

Moore continued, "Women need to acknowledge the fact that they may be spending parts of their lives alone through either death or divorce."

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(Pictured above) Jeanne Zell and her twin daughters Katy and Jenny.