

## Book Review Editor Ruth Stewart



become enmeshed in the correctional system.

The author has studied in great depth the backgrounds and offending patterns of one hundred boys held in a secure facility and one hundred who are held in an "open" facility. In both groups the boys were aged between 14½ years and 16 years.

She attempts to answer the questions as to why some need security and some do not. On only three scales are the boys in each group significantly different. One scale related to boys with handicapped fathers who were present in greater numbers in the security unit. Of the other two scales, one related to the number of placements including children's home, foster care, and even prison placements that each boy had been through, and the other to the length of time the boys had been in the "child care" system.

In both cases the boys in the security unit had been through many more placements than the boys in the open unit and they had spent a great deal more of their lives in care.

They are described as "moving restlessly from one placement to another, presenting problems for those charged with their care and eventually running away (absconding) from each successive placement."

The message which is evident in these and the many other findings in the book is one that is well known to operatives and administrators in the Juvenile Justice area in Victoria and elsewhere, but that Governments have not as yet begun to fund adequately. That message is, that if you are born into families which are economically vulnerable, who reside in urban areas where social amenities are few and far between and where the prevailing adolescent culture is predominantly delinquent, you are at high risk for being caught up into the Juvenile Justice System.

The corollary statement that needs to be made is that it is much easier to get caught up into the system than it

is to get out again.

In Cairine Petrie's own words "it is the nature of the child's residential experience that makes him an absconder. Boys run away because of the places they are in". (Page 15)

The child who starts out life "behind the eight ball" learns to live by the rules he sees around him. This often leads to conflict with the system and involvement in the system. In turn the system which is given the responsibility for caring for you makes it, if not inevitable, highly likely that you will continue to "offend" to the point where maximum security is the only answer it has for your problems.

This book is valuable in that it analyses a great range of information about the two groups of boys with a specific focus on the reasons why one group has been defined as needing maximum security and the other open placement.

In the process many myths about the reasons for such divergent placements are laid to rest, in theory if not in practice!

It is also valuable because it will enable interested readers to sift through the issues raised and hopefully begin formulating constructive, residential or community based alternatives for dealing with young people which in turn could remove the system based and to that extent, artificial problems currently affecting too many children in our society.

Overall, a book well worth reading, full of interesting and detailed analysis, but throughout, warmly argued with a great deal of love and concern for the boys themselves and for their plight.

*B.C. ANDERSON  
Supervisor, Reception & Youth  
Training Centres  
Department of Community  
Welfare Services, Victoria*



## STEP-PARENTING: HOW TO LIVE WITH OTHER PEOPLE'S CHILDREN

by Brenda Maddox  
First published U.K. 1975 by Andre  
Deutsch as *Half-Parent*  
Reprinted by Unwin Paperbacks,  
London, 1980 219 pages.

This book on how to live with other people's children is a handy guide to step-parenting — certainly a more valuable wedding gift than a silver coffee urn to those about to take on a marriage mate with children. Written in an entertaining but informative way by one who has been there, Brenda Maddox discusses the myths and facts of step-relationships as well as a gamut of "step-problems" inherently possible in "remade" families. Uniquely, she presents the step-parent's point of view.

The primary message of this slim volume is in fact that most people in English speaking nations who enter into second marriages (for one or both partners) with offspring (from one or both partners) do so with little or no clarification of the duties, rights and expectations of the role of step-parent. As the author says in her foreword, "step-parenthood is so vague and so undefined even in the law that with the best will in the world, step-parents and step-children have to invent their relationship as they go. There are no rules." More often than not, the realities of step-parenthood contrast sharply with the raptures of the new found marital relationship. One of the harshest of these realities is that the myth of the wicked step-mother, portrayed widely in children's literature from Cinderella to Hansel and Gretel, is not only still prevalent but flourishing.

The author defines a stepfamily as a household unit, with a married couple at the head, where a child, of one or both of the spouses, from a previous marriage lives, or is a frequent visitor. With the rate of re-marriage almost

# REVIEWS



keeping pace with the rising rate of divorce in the U.K. and the U.S. the phenomenon of stepfamilies is increasingly common, yet little has been written about it. Far more prevalent a problem than the adopted child, the handicapped child, or the fatherless child, there has been little research on a subject that cries out for investigation. One explanation offered for this is that the relationship stirs up a great deal of pain: the feelings aroused by step-children, for many people, create avoidance behaviour. The other reason suggested for lack of study is that stepfamilies are not easily accessible for investigation. Unlike a broken home where society can act in *loco parentis*, or in adoption where a couple opens their doors voluntarily, a step-family is seen as a healed breach, a remade family, and there is a formidable respect for the privacy of a family in our society.

In seeking some answers to the needs and problems of stepfamilies, the author interviewed nearly 100 step-parents. They lived in either the U.K. or the U.S. Almost all were white and middle class. (Working class step-parents were harder to find and far more reluctant to discuss their family situation.) Most of those interviewed in the study were still married to the spouse who had made them a step-parent. Unfortunately the stepchildren of the step-parents were not interviewed.

The areas investigated include: the ambiguous relationship of the new step-parent to his/her "instant" family; the inadequacy (and frequent inaccuracy) of step-terminology, and the feelings evoked by them; pre-marital assumptions, or why people marry parents; contrasting step-parenthood after a death and after a divorce; the "unacceptable" feelings of guilt and resentment; discipline and conflict — who holds the authority; the missing incest taboo; new babies or no babies; the omnipresent wicked-stepmother-myth; obligations without rights.

These topics are discussed by the author in a free flowing style in which her own findings in the form of comments, quotes and interchanges are reinforced by classic examples from literature and biography. Like many books on serious topics written for popular consumption, the study design and analysis of data is lacking, so it's impossible to judge the rigor of the analysis. In addition the reference citations are listed at the back of the book by chapter and page number and do not appear in the narrative. This makes the book more readable for most, yet those who wish to delve more deeply have some guidelines.

The strength of the book lies in its candid approach to a complex relationship that no monogamous society has found easy. The irreconcilable facts are that children do not like divorce and substitute parents, yet adults demand the freedom to live with whom they love. Until such families stop going along with the irrational facade that all families, including those with stepchildren are ipso facto happy families, things will never come right. A step-parent is an added dimension in a family circle upheaval and tension are inevitable. To pretend otherwise is foolish and fallacious. Maddox argues that facing up to the realities openly and together takes away the pretense, provides a climate for honest interchange, and may lead the way to a more comfortable everyday living relationship, if not acceptance.

While the book is most helpful for prospective step-parents, and those already in the role, in that it sensitizes them to the dimensions of the problem and provides a beginning source of conventional wisdom, there are considerable insights for the professional as well. The book also points out the need for a more rigorous and systematic study of step-parenting.

Ann J. Pilcher, MSW, ACSW  
Lecturer,  
Department of Social Work,  
La Trobe University.



## "THE ROOTS OF LOVE"

by Helene S. Arnstein,  
Unwin Paperbacks, London,  
1980, 239 pages.

When the blurb on the back cover of the paperback quotes Margaret Mead as saying "A warm friendly book that has distilled the best of modern thinking about the needs of young children" I was a little impressed. However the book "The Roots of Love" by Helene S. Arnstein leaves me a little puzzled as to what moved Miss Mead to such an accolade.

"The Roots of Love" is one among many of recently published books aimed at helping you relate to your child in a warm, positive way, so that the child may grow up to be well-balanced, happy and healthy. It is aimed at "the families who have the no-more-than-usual problems of family living" and talks much about the importance of giving and receiving love and how you too can do it successfully. In theoretical approach it can be described as neo-Freudian drawing on psycho-analytic literature with a little anthropology thrown in for balance.

There is no doubt it is a warm and friendly book. It is like this, I feel, in its efforts to lower the anxiety of parents who are very concerned about loving their newborn babe or toddler. Ms Arnstein is at pains to tell you that you too can do it, just because you are reading the book and are motivated. The book comes across as being very supportive, particularly to those who are having problems.

There is also no doubt that this book tries to be modern, with sections on the busy career woman turned mother, the new more involved role of