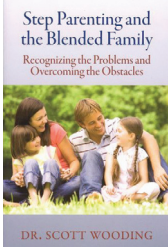


## PARENTING



**Step Parenting and the Blended Family: Recognizing the Problems and Overcoming the Obstacles**

**Scott Wooding**  
Fitzhenry & Whiteside  
Hardcover \$24.95 (216pp)  
978-1-55455-024-1

Being a parent is the toughest job you'll ever love. When you're a stepparent, the job can be even harder. The more relationships there are to navigate within a family, the more chances for misunderstandings, resentments, and breakdowns in communication.

Luckily, Dr. Scott Wooding has written a useful, accessible book for people facing the special hurdle of step parenting. Wooding, who has thirty-five years of experience in education and psychology and has written numerous other books on child-rearing, believes that if the challenges of creating a new family are met with plenty of patience, respect, communication, and, when necessary, professional guidance, families can arrive at "the plateau when peace and harmony generally exist in the family."

Wooding begins by addressing some of the issues that should be dealt with before remarriage is even a consideration. "Breakup baggage" includes all the hurt feelings, anger, resentment, guilt, and other poisons left behind after the dissolution of the first marriage. Not only do these have a negative impact on the emotional health of the ex-spouses, any children from the marriage will be adversely affected as well. If a person carries this emotional bundle into his or her second marriage, the effect might be devastating.

Wait, Wooding advises, possibly for years. While this may be difficult when love strikes anew, the children will benefit and the resulting family will be stronger than ever. Rushing into marriage while towing children behind could mean, eventually, another failed relationship. On the other hand, people who practice patience and strive for emotional clarity have a good chance of overcoming the miserable statistics concerning second marriages.

In further chapters, such as "Remarriage," "Blended Families," and "Teenagers: A Special Case," Wooding warns newly married parents that family life won't be all sunshine. This is one of his greatest services; when adults aren't shocked at the anger and resentment displayed by dismayed stepchildren, they are much more likely to respond with compassion. "Their hostility is not personal," Wooding explains. "They're scared, confused, and angry and you present a convenient target."

Wooding's tone is practical and down-to-earth. His more clinical observations are sprinkled generously with case histories in which blended families both succeed and fail, accord-

ing to their behaviors. Readers are invited to find wisps of themselves in these stories of other families, and perhaps discover solutions to their own problems alongside the subjects. He always treats his examples with respect and even manages to find humor in potentially prickly situations. When discussing discipline, consequences, and hesitancy on the part of parents, Wooding writes, "Will the child get confused? Will there be psychological damage? Nuts—just do something." In the occasionally fraught world of blended families, this book provides a refreshingly pragmatic map to emotional minefields.

While we all hope to get it right the first time around, as Wooding points out in his introduction the chances of that are shrinking with every generation. With the right tools, however, parents and stepparents can persevere and help mend the torn ideals of the newly wedded after the cake has been all eaten up. *Andi Diehn*

## PERFORMING ARTS



**Make Merry in Step and Song: A Seasonal Treasury of Music, Mummer's Plays & Celebrations in the English Folk Tradition**

**Bronwen Forbes**  
Llewellyn Publications  
Softcover \$19.95 (264pp)  
978-0-7387-1500-1

The lead dancer raises high over his head a star created by locking together the swords of his fellow dancers. Slowly he lowers the star until the center circles the neck of the Old King. Each dancer takes possession of his hilt once more, and, in a flash, withdraws it from the intricate formation. The Old King falls to the floor, dead.

This scene is the dramatic climax of the longsword dance, often performed in the Yule season as part of a mummer's play. Mummer's plays were passed from generation to generation in the oral tradition, and center around the idea of death and rebirth, as shown when the king is brought back to life with a little magic. This idea is central to many seasonal celebrations; for instance, Winter Solstice represents the rebirth of the sun, and spring has long been seen as a time when the earth reawakens from a long winter sleep.

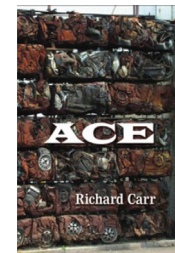
Forbes, who teaches workshops on English folk traditions at Pagan and Wiccan festivals and conferences around the country, presents instructions for eight dances, scripts for six plays, and music and lyrics for thirty-nine songs. Throughout the book she also discusses the history of these folk traditions and their application to Pagan celebrations today.

According to Forbes, her purpose in writing this book was "to continue...the process of reintroducing American Pagans to their pre-Christian British folk customs." While she succeeds in offering Pagans a thorough guide to performing these celebrations, her audience does not need to

be so limited. Many readers interested in history, theater, music, and dance will find this book to be of interest. The one drawback that students might find is that, while it is obviously well-researched, many of the book's historical facts are not cited with their original source. A selected bibliography is included, however, along with contact information for the Country Dance and Song Society of America to aid in further research.

This book shares only a fraction of the folk traditions practiced, but it is a great start to incorporating them into seasonal celebrations. After all, as Forbes says, "A tradition can survive only if people still honor it and make it an important part of their lives." (March) *Christine Canfield*

## POETRY



**Ace**  
**Richard Carr**  
Word Works  
Softcover \$15.00 (76pp)  
978-091538070-1

"I am hardtop ironclad crash-tested / and only need someplace safe to sleep / or sleep it off / or sit up sleepless," Richard Carr writes. *Ace*, a novel in verse, interweaves four lives separated through hurt, longing, and rebellion in a series of fourteen line poems. From the reader's vantage point, *Ace* unfurls its landscape like a desecrated dollhouse, where even the remaining trappings of comfort are somehow skewed: "but no one ever saw inside my little room / the dresser leaning against the bed / or ever knocked on the door / bedside lamp with a yellow shade."

The four narrators of *Ace* are all given space and voice within this collection, each persona fully formed. *Ace*, "a name I picked up for being awkward as a kid / sideswiping parked cars / twisting up my bicycles in crashes / a sarcasm / a jeer," is the culmination of junkyard despair and the seeming toughness that only such an upbringing can allow. Yet we see a tender *Ace* in his longing for his former lover, Carol, and grandson Little *Ace*. Carr's poetics crouch in shadows over his grandson in the words, "put an end to curiosity...a danger now / better that he hide from me." Carol enters posthumously, detailing her death and revealing facets slowly, like screen credits. In the bars, Carol's "hair [coated] with sticky nicotine / thickening and peppering my complexion / lowering my voice / until one day someone called me a skank / or maybe no one but I believed it." Her green passion "lived alone among the ferns / hung everywhere for health and serenity." Carol and *Ace*'s child, Miss Princess, is the expected fruit of such a juxtaposed landscape, arguably real, and more alarming because of it. To Miss Princess, "raising my own child would prove / I'm mature...because who needs