

The Changing Face of *Families*

By Allison Seale

It's 5:30 a.m. when the alarm clock blares. Slowly, the sleepy occupant of the room rises. In the next two hours she manages to shower, make breakfast for her two toddlers, get them both dressed and fed and taken to their respective day cares. On a good day she manages to make it in to her 8 to 5 job by 8:30. She wishes she had help — a companion for herself, a male influence for her children.

The same morning, two blocks away, another family is beginning to rise. The couple takes turns showering, then they dress for another workday; each takes responsibility for dressing and feeding a child. Over breakfast they plot strategies for picking up the children from child care that evening. She has to stay late for work tonight; he'll have to solo. A plan agreed upon, they each load a child in a car and head off to separate day care locations and separate jobs. She'll take some time during lunch to visit her oldest son's school. She wishes she could be a homeroom mom like her mother had been for her, but they need the income her job provides.

On another day, a man drives 20 miles to pick up his children for their every-other-weekend visit; he wishes he could spend more time with them. He picks them up from the house they share with their mother's new husband. It hurts knowing that another man is seeing them grow, watching them change and sharing their little accomplishments. It seems like only yesterday when they were a family.

Family. The word conjures up all sorts of warm, fuzzy images. Most commonly, it brings to mind a Cleaveresque clan made up of a housewife, a bread-winning dad and two well-adjusted children.

But gone are the days of the work-a-day daddy and stay-at-home mommy that characterized families of the Beaver Cleaver generation. In place of the "traditional" family of the 50s are dual income families; single-parent households, usually headed by a divorced or unmarried mother; and blended families, made up of couples who each have children from other relationships.

But each of these family types have something in common: the parents are raising their children in ways that bear little resemblance to their own upbringing, and none of them knows how it will turn out.

Simon Says

Tres Watson knows something about what it's like to grow up in a broken home. His parents divorced when he was 14.

"It bothered me, but there really wasn't much I could do," he said. "I wish it wouldn't have happened, but it wasn't in my control."

Watson said that he remembers having been very involved with football and baseball before his parents split up, but gave them up for rodeo because he could travel out of town. "It was a way for me to escape — to be out on my own."

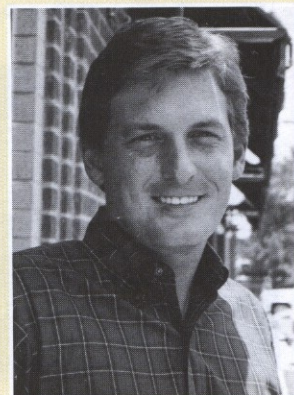
At 26, Watson is still single. He says that perhaps his parents' divorce has made him, at least subconsciously, afraid of marriage.

"You're strongly against divorce when you've been through one," he said. "You want to be sure it's right when you do marry."

Jeff and Susan McDowell, of College Station, seem to be two of the lucky ones. They've been married 14 years and point to their love of mutual sports and a strong friendship as the reason their marriage has survived longer than many of their friends' marriages. Like many couples today, they made the decision to put off having children. However, last year they had a change of heart that led to the birth of their son, Chase.

Apart from taking two months maternity leave, Susan has continued to work full time, as does Jeff. They divide the tasks associated with getting their son to and from school: Jeff has the morning shift and Susan makes the evening run.

"There's a void that Chase fills that we didn't know existed before," Jeff



Tres Watson

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Jeannie Goss with children Justin, Jason, and Calli

said. "We were missing something."

"We might have had a child a bit sooner if we had known how rewarding it could be. There's something special in knowing that you've created another human that might have an impact on the world."

Jeannie Goss, the coordinator for the Parents

As Teachers program, knows plenty about the joys of parenting and miracles children can create. Her job is to teach new and expectant mothers good parenting skills, but as a divorced mother of three, she said her job often helps her at home, too.

Her children, who range in age from 11- to 5-years-old, now belong to a blended family. When

they draw a picture of their family, the two eldest draw a picture of their traditional family, while the youngest includes her father's new wife and her two step-sisters.

"The concept of a nuclear family is foreign to Calli," Goss explained. "Life with a single parent is the only life Calli has ever known." One night Calli commented to her mother that when she grows up and is a mommy and her boyfriend comes over, she is going to cook him dinner.

"The traditional 'nuclear' family is not traditional anymore," Goss added. "The average family is either blended, single or has two parents working."

Too many people think that just because these systems are non-traditional, they are not a strong system, says Goss. They treat it as a problem.

"I didn't ask to be a single parent, but I am and want to be accepted and respected — not looked at as a failure. I am a much better parent now. If you are happy with yourself, you will spread that happiness to those you touch."

"Take whatever system you are in and make it the best it can be. Say to yourself, 'This is my family, and it is complete.'"

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Courage to Break the Cycle

by Allison Seale

Teenage mothers, especially those who have children before they turn 18, often fail to finish school. They are less likely to marry, and when they do, they are more likely to become separated or divorced. For these reasons, they are also more likely to be poor and dependent on welfare.

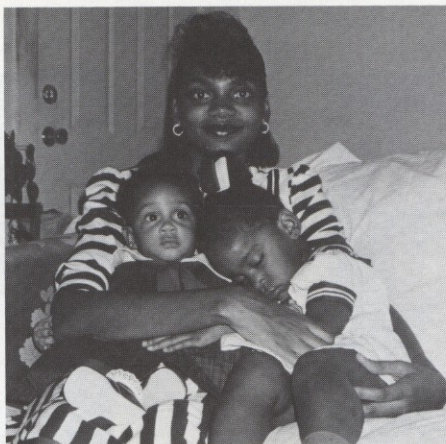
Plagued by poverty and stress, these families often lack the emotional and material resources to meet their children's basic needs. And, too often, their children are abused — many physically. Children in families such as these experience failure from the earliest stages of life and grow up believing they are meant to fail. A cycle develops and children born to teenage parents are more likely to have children of their own during their teenage years.

But Jaslin Waddle, a 20-year-old mother of two, plans to break this cycle. Sexually abused by a family member when she was young, Waddle seemed to have the deck stacked against her. She was angry and seriously depressed and lacked self-esteem; but she always did well in school. An honor student at Bryan High, she got pregnant during her senior year but graduated with her class.

Waddle knew that she lacked the parenting skills she needed to provide a healthy environment for her unborn child and enrolled herself in a program that was being offered through the Bryan school system called "Parents As Teachers." She was one of their first clients.

When her first daughter, Epiphany, was born, Waddle began to incorporate the parenting skills that she had learned through the program. She married the father of her child and became pregnant with her second daughter, Alaria, 6 months, before she decided to separate from him and move back to Bryan to live with her grandmother.

Slipping into depression, Waddle was admitted to the Sandstone Center. There she learned to deal with the scars from her childhood and to set goals for herself and her children.



Jaslin Waddle with daughters Alaria and Epiphany.

Equipped with the determination to once again work towards breaking the cycle, Waddle sought to fulfill her dreams: she wanted to go to college, hoping to eventually earn a Ph.D. in English, and she wanted to be a published author. This fall, Waddle's dreams are on their way to coming true. She is enrolled as a freshman at Blinn and made an "A" on her first English paper. She is also compiling some of her poetry and hopes to add essays and short stories to complete her first book which she hopes to have published within two years.

With school, her days start at seven in the morning. She generally showers with the girls and makes them their bottles before dropping them off at day care and hurrying to class. She studies after class during the three hours she sometimes has before she picks up the girls. But at least once a week, she has

an appointment regarding some of her benefit programs or a doctor's appointment.

Well on her way to recovery, Waddle is quick to give thanks for the progress she has made.

"I give credit to God for just about everything I do," she said. "I know that if it was just me, I wouldn't be able to do it."

Waddle says parenting is tough but well worth the work and sacrifice of the organized life she used to try to lead.

"My children have added life to my life. They give me reason to live."

To Alaria by Jaslin Waddle

*My daughter, my sweetness,
my baby girl!
Your smile and your nature
have brightened my world!
I love how you watch me
with bright, sparkling eyes
Awaiting attention
without screaming cries.*

*I love the closeness
only we can share
When I sit and nurse you
in our rocking chair.
When you snuggle beside me,
mouth to breast
As I sing you
into slumber's rest.*

*You're a sweet child —
Wouldn't trade you for the world!
My daughter, my sweetness, my baby girl!*

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Pinning the Blame

So what's happened to the American family in the last 40 years? Trying to pin down an all-inclusive answer would be like trying to nail Jello to a tree, but there are some trends. Topping the list is divorce.

Over the past 20 years, a rapidly rising divorce rate coupled with a rising rate of out-of-wedlock childbearing, has dramatically increased the number of children in single-parent families. Divorce and separation are the major causes of single parenthood in the United States. Indeed, nearly half of all marriages will fail, giving this nation the highest divorce rate in the world.

Perhaps the most dramatic social change of the past 20 years is the number of mothers entering the work force, according to a study released this year by the National Commission on Children. Increasing economic pressure on families has dictated to many a necessity to check their children in day care and start punching a clock. In fact, the percentage of women employed has increased from 34 percent in 1950 to 55 percent in 1987. Of those, almost half have children under the age of three, and their numbers are growing every year.

"The new family structures you see are outgrowths of societal changes," said Dr. Sue Lucas, of Texas A&M's Student Counseling Service. "All of these changes have occurred with no kind of role models about how to do this."

Dr. Lucas, who did her dissertation on dual career families, said a problem that often arises is that employers still assume that employees belong to traditional family structures and are not always flexible to special needs of working married and single parents.

Responding to Change

The current trend, however, is moving toward a renewed interest in the family. Maybe this is because so many people think that the American family is in trouble. National opinion surveys of Americans from all walks of life, whether raising children or not, show that they believe there is something terribly amiss with children and families.

And why shouldn't they? Divorce, adolescent crime and adolescent suicide rates have all soared. Salaries has failed to keep up with increased costs and more and more children are born into poverty without adequate health care. And without that care, they are more prone to learning disabilities and health and behavioral problems that will almost certainly affect their performance in school.

Pretty bleak, huh? Local statistics point out that families and children in the Brazos Valley are faring better than their national counterparts. The infant mortality rate in the Brazos Valley is less than half the national rate and 75 percent of our children live with two parents, compared to 50 percent nationally. Innovative programs such as Parents As Teachers, JOBS (Jobs, Opportu-

Just the Facts

Approximately 43 percent of mother-only families are poor, compared to only about 7 percent of two-parent families.

Americans have 30 percent less leisure time today than they did 20 years ago.

The United States has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the developed world. Brazos County had an infant mortality rate of 4.8 per 1000 live births in 1990. The national level is 10 per 1000 live births.

Some 32 million Americans, including 8.3 million children under age 18, have no form of health insurance coverage.

Children from single parent families are two to three times as likely to suffer developmental delay, learning disability or behavioral problems as children living with both parents.

One in four adolescents (approximately 7 million) between the ages of 10 and 17 engage in social behaviors that can lead to serious long-term problems.

The number of children who have seen a psychologist or psychiatrist for treatment has increased 80 percent since 1981.

Suicide rate among teens has increased 65 percent since 1960 and is now the leading cause of death after accidents.

By the mid-1980s, it took 44 percent of the average family's income to buy a median-priced house—up from 25 percent in 1970. The average cost of a new car came to 48 percent of the median family income in the mid-1980s, compared to 35 percent in 1970. Tax burdens have also risen.

Median earnings of young female householders was \$3,005 in 1989, barely 36 percent of the official poverty level for a family of two.

To receive the equivalent tax liability as in 1948, each person would receive a personal exemption of approximately \$8,260.

The United States is the only western, industrialized nation that does not have a child allowance policy or some universal, public benefit for families raising children.

Twenty-five percent of all infants are born to women who do not receive early prenatal care. Locally, hospital records reflect that percentage to be 3 percent.

The Prenatal Clinic, which provides prenatal care for women with low incomes who reside in Brazos County, saw more than 700 women last year for prenatal services. The cost to deliver these services was an estimated \$203,000 of which \$11,000 was paid by the patients.

2 million to 5 million American children are estimated to experience hunger.

One in four children in the United States is raised by just one parent, usually a divorced or unmarried mother.

One in five families lives on an income below the national poverty level.

Poverty rates among young families have almost doubled since the mid-1960s.

Today more adolescent boys die of gunshot wounds than all natural diseases.

Opinion surveys show that Americans from all walks of life, whether they are raising children or not, believe that something is terribly amiss with children and families.

In 1960, children accounted for 36 percent of all Americans; In 1990, children accounted for only 26 percent and by 2010, they are expected to make up only 23 percent of all Americans.

Demographers project that the proportion of minority children will continue to increase over the next 20 years. Because minority children are disproportionately disadvantaged in terms of family income, access to high-quality education and health care, and employment opportunities, the nation now faces a substantially needier population of young people.

More and more, marriage and child-bearing are becoming separate events. In 1960, only 5 percent of all births in the U.S. were to unwed mothers; in 1988, more than 25 percent were to unwed mothers.

More than half of all white children and three-quarters of all Black children born in the 1970s and 1980s are likely to live some portion of their formative years with only their mothers.

Between 1970 and 1990, the proportion of mothers with children under age 6 who were looking for work outside their homes rose from 32 percent to 58 percent. Today, approximately 10.9 million children under age 6, including 1.7 million babies under age one and 9.2 million toddlers and preschoolers have mothers in the labor force.

Employers who offer insurance coverage for dependent children are becoming less willing to contribute to this coverage. In 1980, 40 percent of employers paid for dependent coverage in full; In 1990, only about 33 percent did. Medicaid benefited only an estimated 59 percent of the nation's poor children.

nities and Basic Skills) and WINGS (Winning Independence and Gaining Success) have been designed to target our at-risk parents to help them break the cycle of poverty.

Locally, both public school systems have established extended day care programs because of the concern in the community for latch key kids — children who return from school to an empty home — and the availability of afternoon day care.

Another program, passed by the state legislature two years ago, provides that school buses may take children either to their home or a day-care site. Previously, a child had to be picked up and dropped off at the same site.

In the private sector, many employers are starting to look at ways to support families. Large employers like American Airlines and Baylor Child Care Center in Dallas and the Spring Branch School District have opened on-site child care for their employees to use. Scott & White in Temple and the University of Texas expect to open similar facilities this year.

"We think it's going to help us with retention of employees," said Don Nelson, director of public affairs at Scott & White in Temple. "It will make it a lot easier for working parents to have their children nearby." Nelson said they expect to open their child care facility in Temple this March.

Texas A&M University System's College Station campus looked into establishing on-site day care two years ago for its faculty, staff, employees and students. After polling the users and providers of day care services, the University concluded that there was "adequate, available, and generally affordable child care in the Bryan/College Station area."

Texas A&M is not the only employer locally that has looked into providing specialized child care services for their employees and the community. In 1988, St. Joseph Hospital & Health Center looked into providing "sick child" care to the community. Essentially, they reached the same conclusion A&M had.

"A lot of people," Lou Miller, project analyst for St. Joseph, said, "either had a family member already in town or they had a strong feeling that if they had a sick child, the last thing they wanted to do was drop them off at a place they were unfamiliar with."

While St. Joseph decided against providing the sick-child service to the community, they do offer it to their employees and believe that it has helped curb absenteeism.

Texas A&M decided that the most prudent course of action would be the establishment of a TAMUS Child Care Council and a child care data bank/referral service that aids those in search of child care in selecting a provider.

This type of referral service is something both large and small employers are doing to aid their employees with families. Other ways include "flex-time" programs, which allow employees flexibility in their work day schedules based on family needs, and "Pre-tax salary reductions" that allow an employee to have monies for child or

Christopher Designs

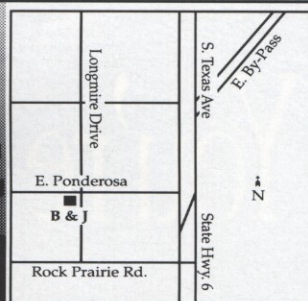
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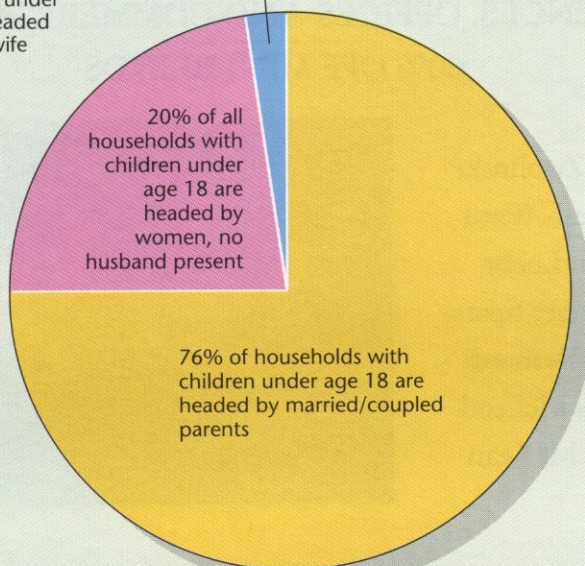
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Brazos County Family Profile

Families with Children

4% of all households with children under age 18 are headed by men, no wife present



20% of all households with children under age 18 are headed by women, no husband present

76% of households with children under age 18 are headed by married/coupled parents

Total number of households with children under age 18: 13,535
Total number of married-coupled families without children: 9,199


Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1990 Statistics

elder care deducted from their pay checks before taxes are calculated. This system benefits both the employee and the employer because it reduces the amount of taxes employers pay.

Dr. Carol Nasworthy, with the Texas Work and Family Clearinghouse in Austin, said that what most employers who initiate some of these programs have found is that productivity goes up, moral goes up, absences are fewer and there is less turnover.

Slowly, government, too, is beginning to hear the screams from the domestic front. The Family Support Act of 1988 took steps toward reforming the welfare system to encourage economic self-sufficiency among low-income families and mother-only families. There have also been recent pro-family reforms of the federal income tax policy. But will the help that's needed get there in time?

It's Your Turn . . . Right?

So, we bump around in the dark with this experiment we call the modern family. We look to books, friends, magazines and support groups for advice on how to guide our lives. And like a child's precarious game of pick-up sticks, about the best thing we hope for is that as we pick up each new piece of our lives, nothing else falls out of place. Whatever type of family system we live in, each of us is hoping that the fragile supports that hold our lives together don't give way and send the family's structure tumbling down. 

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