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For more information about One Family, Two Family, New Family, visit <http://www.stepfamilyadvice.com>

Excerpt from One Family, Two Family, New Family: Stories And Advice For Stepfamilies (www.stepfamilyadvice.com) by Lisa Cohn and William Merkel, Ph.D.

In this book, Lisa and Bill tell "hers" and "his" stories about their experiences forming their stepfamily. They weave in advice from Bill, a Ph.D. psychologist. This excerpt is from Chapter One: Exploits In Dating.

When I met Bill at my Third Annual Bring-A-Bachelor party, my intention was to introduce him to some of my friends who were single moms. I already had a boyfriend, Dwayne, whom I had met at my first Bring-A-Bachelor party three years earlier.

When I invented these parties, I was a single mother who thought she'd never again meet an attractive, intelligent man. My parties solved the problem--for me and many of my girlfriends.

The most important rule of Bring-a-Bachelor parties: Guests had to supply a new male face in order to get in the door. I had plenty of single female friends who were interested in meeting new men.

On that November night, one of my friends took the rules of Bring-A Bachelor parties very seriously: Ellen Goldschmidt, a neighbor whose son was good friends with my five-year-old son, Travis. At the fateful party, she and her husband brought the only single man they knew, and waited at my doorstep to ensure they would be allowed to enter. Bill, their guest, was a Ph.D. psychologist and taught at a Portland hospital. He had recently been separated from his wife and had two children.

When I greeted Bill at the entrance to my house, he didn't seem at all ill-at-ease.

"I'm Ellen's ticket in the door tonight," he said, and shook my hand.

I laughed, and blushed. The look in his blue eyes was direct and curious. It threw me off balance for a moment. I worried that because he was a psychologist, he could somehow read my mind.

At that moment, my boyfriend, Dwayne, was dancing with one of my friends and bragging about his home cooking. He had already disco-danced and bumped his way through most of the single women at the party. Of course, the mothers were always at the bottom of Dwayne's dance card. I was tempted to spend the evening dancing with men who were more accepting of women with children.

In fact, by the end of the party, I was ready to shove Dwayne out the door, along with his garlic-and-basil meatballs, hand-rolled, chicken-filled pastries and new dance shoes. I didn't want to hear him tell one more person that his parents would be aghast when I arrived in Nebraska on Christmas with an "instant family" in tow.

Instead of starting an argument, I posted myself on the porch to say good-bye to guests. That was when Bill approached to say he was on his way home.

"What's all this fuss about your trip to Nebraska?" he asked.

"I'm going there this Christmas to meet Dwayne's family for the first time," I said. "The only problem is they're Catholic and shocked that I come from a Jewish family. So I'm scared out of my mind. And apparently the fact that I have a son raises questions about whether I'm really a virgin and a suitable partner for Dwayne."

"Did you take all the photos of your son?" Bill asked.

"Yes. I think plastering my walls with Travis's face is my way of reminding Dwayne that I have a beautiful son who isn't going anywhere for at least 13 more years," I said.

He raised an eyebrow, then peered at me as if he understood my dilemma.

"I have two kids, you know." He added, "This is what my experience as a single father and a psychologist has taught me: Stepparenting isn't for everyone. You couldn't come up with a more impossible set of relationships."

When Bill left, I stood on the porch alone for a moment. I wondered if he had been flirting with me.

BILL

Single parents: You should learn to revel in your children. If you are recently divorced or widowed, wait a while to date and solidify your relationship with your children. Take stock of what went wrong in your marriage. Try to learn from it. Otherwise, the patterns that helped shatter your marriage may haunt you in your next relationship. The notion

that there will be big differences between relationships number one, two and three is often naive and optimistic. You may want to find a psychologist, minister or counselor to help you explore the issues that broke up your marriage or that interfere with your couple-making abilities.

It's also important to take a breather to learn to be without a partner. There's a real danger in going from one relationship to another out of a desperate need to be coupled. It leads to bad decisions about partners. You should not choose partners simply because you dread being alone.

During your single time, check your expectations. Do you hope to meet someone who will provide for your financial needs in the way that your ex-spouse didn't or couldn't? Do you hope to find a substitute parent who will relieve you of the heavy responsibility of parenting young children? Or do you long to find the perfect father that your child never had? All these are bad reasons to find partners. But they're common fantasies, and they're likely to be magnified by the presence of children because, in single parent families, everyone's needs are so pressing and the demands are so endless.

So as you begin to date, slow down and give yourself time. You may surprise yourself. You may find you enjoy being alone with your children. You may discover you can stretch enough to work, pick up the kids from day care, cook for them, read to them and put them to bed everyday. If you learn to revel in your children, you will discover just how precious they are and how much you have to give. You'll be much choosier about your dates; you won't want just anyone to spend time with your kids.

After my own divorce, I grieved for a year. During that time period, I had no interest in dating or even fantasizing as I tried to read the personal ads in the local paper. Then, just as spring began its mischief, I formulated my one-woman-a-year plan: Every relationship should be all honeymoon, short and uncomplicated. I would try to find one girlfriend a year. I would never get married again.

The idea was not to be a womanizer, or to treat anyone badly. My reason was simple: I wanted to avoid pain. I was sure I couldn't handle intense long-term relationships after my breakup with my wife, Linda. My one-woman-a-year plan, I decided, would also give me the emotional freedom to remain as close to my children as I wanted to be. I wasn't sure I could be very involved with a woman and maintain the relationship I had developed with my children.

Lisa was the surprise that diverted me from my plan; I like to think of her as my reprieve