

Beth Bruno, school psychologist and freelance writer, just released the book *Wild Tulips*, a collection of entertaining stories about raising and reaching children, told from her perspectives as mother, stepmother and educator. For autographed copies of *Wild Tulips*, send email to: bbruno@snet.net.

Proposed Annual Holiday: Step Sunday
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There are millions of unsung heroes and heroines in our midst, men and women who deserve recognition but get a bum rap instead. Who are they? They are people like me.

When I met the man I eventually married, he brought two tag-alongs with him on nearly every date. He lived in one state; I lived in another; and his two "extras" lived in yet another. We got together on weekends and crammed as much fun into 48 hours as we could before putting them on a plane (supervised by a stewardess) and then departing for our separate states. The tag-alongs, his children, were as important to our courtship as he was.

I loved the nine-year-old's droll wit and the seven-year-old's impish grin. They mercilessly ragged on me for my Midwestern twang, collapsing with laughter at my pronunciation of any word with "ar" in it. We filled our weekends with games, concerts, shopping, craft projects and home-cooked or restaurant favorites. We spent vacations in Alaska, Florida, Michigan and Vermont.

The dark side, leave-taking, nearly took our breath away. We never grew accustomed to the hellos and good-byes. Guilt swept over the girls for having fun when they knew that their mother had spent the weekend without them. More guilt flooded them for feeling affection toward me. The fairytale wish for reconciliation of their divorced mom and dad persisted, even though years had passed since the break-up. I had no part in their parents' estrangement (I didn't even know them then), but my presence in their lives reminded them that their birth family's story would have no "happily ever after" ending.

The impish one begged me not to marry her father; her droll, quieter sister kept her feelings to herself, but her silence felt like rejection all the same. We hated the words that described our connection after their dad and I married; the words "stepmother" and "stepdaughter," seemed like flashing neon signs that said, "not-real-mother" and "not-real-daughter." It had been much easier for them to introduce me as their Dad's friend Beth and for me to introduce them as Gordon's daughters, Terry and Cindy.

Yet I was proud to be legally related to these two wonderful children, who have enriched my life since the day we met. I've enjoyed doting on them and have always wished they could dote on me, not because we're related by marriage but because we

have so much fun together and genuinely love each other. Early on, there were too many conflicting feelings for that. I reassured them that I was not trying to take the place of their mother in any way; nor was I trying to compete with their mother for their affections. We've come to terms with these complexities over the years.

People like me are the unsung heroes and heroines; we are the stepmothers and stepfathers of the world who genuinely love their kin by marriage and show it, day after day, just like birth parents and true friends do.

In honor of stepmothers, stepfathers and step-relatives everywhere, I propose an annual holiday for stepfamilies to be called Step Sunday. I propose that we celebrate Step Sunday on August 4th, 2002, and every first Sunday of August thereafter. On Step Sunday we will honor the men, women and children in blended families, who grow to love the relatives they acquire by marriage as if they were their own.

I chose the month of August for Step Sunday, because the word "august" means: inspiring awe and reverence; imposing and magnificent; worthy of respect because of age and dignity; venerable; grand.. a little over-the-top, perhaps, but I think it's high time!

To those who agree with me that stepparents and their step-relatives deserve a special annual holiday, please let friends and relatives know. We can easily get the word out in time to celebrate August 4th, 2002, as the next Step Sunday. Plan to honor and bestow gifts on your step-relatives. Let them know, just like you let your friends and blood relatives know, that your love for them is real for dozens of real reasons. Families with stepparents and stepchildren can and do live "happily ever after."

Important note: I have two stepdaughters, three stepgrandsons, one stepmother and three stepsiblings. I had better start shopping!