

# Lifestyles

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## Local woman part of large number of single parents struggling to raise kids alone

By Dee Ann Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER — “We would have been married 15 years in August,” says Stephanie Bonner of Butler.

In the summer of 1988, she was in her mid-20’s, newly-married, and looking forward to the future.

And she was planning to raise a family.

Just 4 years later, she was raising that family, including two young children and another on the way. But she was doing it alone.

“We had just celebrated our 4th wedding anniversary,” she remembers. “Sara was 33 months old, Robert was 10 months old, and I was pregnant with Jonathan.”

At only 28 years old, Stephanie found herself widowed by an accident that took her husband David’s life. The accident would plunge her into the ranks of single parenthood — a segment of the population that is growing faster than any other.

According to Crown Financial Ministries (CFC), a Christian-based financial and research organization, in 1998, 26% of all families with children were headed by single parents. But today, that number has risen dramatically.

There are about 11.6 million single mothers raising children under the age of 21 in the United States today. An estimated 25 million children are growing up without fathers in the home. That



# Together alone

Choctaw Sun graphics by Mickey Bryant

number totals about 45% of today’s American kids.

A significant part of those statistics are the result of divorce. With the national divorce rate rising, about 38% of all single parents are raising their children alone because of divorce.

But by far the most alarming of the statistics are the rapidly increasing numbers of single parents who have never been married.

In 1970, 11.5% of births in Alabama were to unmarried women. By 2004, that number had grown to 36.5% — or more than one-third of all births.

And for most of those single parents, life is hard.

While some are able to manage with few financial problems, others like Stephanie spend years struggling to make ends meet. When compared to married couples with children, female-headed households are more than four times as likely to live in poverty. In fact, according to the CFC, nearly six out of 10 chil-

dren who were being raised by their mothers alone were living near or below the poverty line.

“I’ve worked 60 to 80 hours a week,” Stephanie says. “I’ve missed a lot of time with them just trying to pay the bills. But I’ve tried to be with them as much as I could. Sometimes I would leave work to go somewhere with them, then go back to work more hours afterward.”

“It was hard,” she adds. “When they were little, after paying day-care, I didn’t clear but about \$35 a week.”

Although their financial situation is somewhat better today, Stephanie and her family still struggle.

“I really can’t save any money because it takes everything I make to make ends meet,” she explains.

Single parent families, however, do not always mean that the mother is raising the children. According to CFC, about 3.1 million children live with their fathers only. And for those

fathers, life is also difficult — but maybe not as difficult financially.

Data from the U.S. Census shows that in 2000, the average income for single mother households was \$18,000. For single father households, it was \$30,000.

But single parents like Stephanie have more to worry about than finances. Statistics show that children are less likely to get involved in drugs, sexual activity, and other risky behaviors if they are part of an intact two-parent family.

Studies show that boys living in a fatherless home are two to three times more likely to be involved in crime or drop out of school. Almost 70% of young men in America’s prisons report growing up without fathers in their homes. Likewise, girls living in homes without fathers are two to three times more likely to become pregnant as teenagers and have their own marriages end in divorce.

As with many single

church, and is deeply involved in the local Girl Scouts with her daughter, as well as the Boy Scouts with her sons.

“I started doing Boy Scouts because I wanted my boys to have male influence in their lives,” she says. “I wanted them to learn character that way.”

Sara says that she has come to understand that her family’s circumstances have not been ideal. But, she says, some whose fathers are still alive may be living in situations far worse.

“Everybody talks about their dads being gone,” she says, “and about them not paying child support, and all that. And some of them talk about their dads being in jail. I don’t have all that to deal with.”

With her high school graduation on the horizon, Sara is making plans to attend college. She is determined that her life will be less financially difficult as her mother’s has been.

“I plan to major in obstetrics and gynecology,” she says. “And I want to minor in photography.”

Both Sara and her mother add that they are hoping that grants and scholarships will help pay her way through school.

With her children fast approaching adulthood, Stephanie’s days of raising kids alone will soon be over. Then, she says, she will take time to think about her own future.

“People ask me why I never got remarried,” she says. “I just tell them that I have only a short time to raise my kids. I didn’t want to get married just to have a man in the house, especially if he wasn’t going to be good to my children. So I decided a long time ago just to focus on raising them first.”

“There are times when I get lonely,” she adds, with obvious emotion. “Sometimes it would be nice to have someone to talk to at night. But in four more years, I’ll have all my children raised, then when I’ve done that, I’ll think about Stephanie.”



Submitted photo

## Yard of the Month for March

GILBERTOWN — Pictured are Mr. Fred Clark and Ruffles after their yard was chosen by the Honeysuckle Garden Club as the “Yard of the Month” for the month of March. Mrs. Clark said that Fred had been working in the yard that day cleaning up pinecones when they were surprised to learn of the club’s decision. You never know when and where The Honeysuckle Garden Club will show up and just what their mission is! The Honeysuckle Garden Club is a member of The Garden Club of Alabama, Inc.

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