

“As a second wife and step mum I can vouch for the fact this book abounds with the soundest of advice. All those contemplating the leap or already travelling the rocky road should buy a copy right now.”

Judy Nunn

THE SECOND WIVES’

GUIDE

Discover the
Secrets to
Survive and
Thrive as a
Second Wife
or Step-Parent

ANGELA
VASSALLO



Dedication

The Second Wives' Guide

Proudly published by *Second Wives Head Quarters*,
a division of Second Wives HQ Pty Ltd.
Sydney, Australia
www.secondwiveshq.com

Copyright © 2014 Second Wives HQ Pty Ltd

ISBN: 978 - 0 - 9925274- 0 - 2

Editing – Megan Kerr, www.ThoughtLeaderBooks.co.uk
Design – Matt Cumming, www.ExpertAuthors.tv
Direction – Dale Beaumont, www.BusinessBlueprint.com
Author Photo – Zahrina Robertson, www.BrandUPortraits.com
Back Cover Copy – Jesse Forrest, www.StartCopywriting.com

Printed and bound by McPherson Printng, www.mcphersonsprinting.com.au

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No Part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the author.

Second Wives Head Quarters Pty Ltd

DISCLAIMER

All the information, techniques, skills and concepts contained within this publication are of the nature of general comment only, and are not in any way recommended as individual advice. The intent is to offer a variety of information to provide a wider range of choices now and in the future, recognising that we all have widely diverse circumstances and viewpoints. Should any reader choose to make use of the information contained herein, this is their decision, and the contributors (and their companies), authors and publishers do not assume any responsibilities whatsoever under any conditions or circumstances. It is recommended that the reader obtain their own independent advice.

*This book is dedicated to all the second wives
and step mums of the world, who seek to live
with dignity and respect.*

*May this book be a beacon of hope for you on
your journey down this somewhat rocky road.*

*Trust this book, and allow yourself to live
the life you have always dreamed.*

*And always remember —
You are second to none!*

Acknowledgements

The Second Wives Guide — has been one of the most challenging and amazing projects of my life. It has been influenced and contributed to by so many talented and generous people. It has been a privilege to write a book for women, to help women. Inspiring and educating women has been a lifelong passion and pursuit of mine. You don't achieve a goal like this without surrounding yourself with the right people.

First and foremost, I want to thank my husband and life partner, Mark. There is no doubt that, without your unwavering support and love, I could never have achieved this dream. You're my biggest inspiration and greatest love. Thank you for always believing in me, and allowing me to dream big!!

To my two stepsons, Jack and James, thank you for allowing me to be a witness to your lives. It has been a pleasure to help and support you, and to watch you grow up to be the fine young gentlemen you are today. I'm very proud to call you my stepsons.

To my son, Dylan, thank you for bringing so much joy, love and light into our lives. You're the funniest, craziest, most loving kid I know, and we wouldn't have you any other way.

To my dear friend and adopted mother, Paula Duncan, who was my first influence in understanding what a real blended

family was. All those years we worked together and lived together, I never knew that one day I would be a second wife and stepmother with a blended family just like you. You showed me what unconditional love was all about. Thank you for all your love, support and encouragement.

Special thanks goes to — Dale Beaumont from *Business Blueprint*, without your guidance, wisdom and knowledge, this book would never have been possible. You have been a beacon of light for me through this whole process. Thank you for always giving me great advice and steering me in the right direction. I look forward to a life long friendship of fun and adventures with our families.

To Megan Kerr (www.thoughtleaderbooks.co.uk) my editor and book coach, thank you for pushing me way out of my comfort zone. You have helped me believe in myself as an author, and you have challenged me to dig deep and produce a book that I am proud of.

Thank you to Zahrina Robertson (www.BrandUPortraits.com) for capturing the perfect photos for my Personal Brand.

Thanks also to –

Laurence Pollwade, Proof Reader
www.LaurenceWins.com

Matt Cumming, Cover Design and Typesetting
www.ExpertAuthors.tv

Robert Stapelfeldt, Printer
www.McphersonsPrinting.com.au

Contents

Introduction	1
PART 1: MARRYING A VILLAGE.	9
<i>Chapter One: Tip of the Iceberg</i>	13
The story of Lyn and Jim	13
Validation and delayed gratification.	16
The concept and clichés about the second wife	20
Your husband’s social circle: old friends and family.	21
Relationship difficulties in families	25
The many complicated layers	28
<i>Chapter Two: Caveat Emptor — “Let the Buyer Beware”</i>	31
The story of Chrissy and Dion.	31
Setting your boundaries.	35

Your personal boundaries . . . . .	.41	The wicked stepmother . . . . .	.94
Prioritise your relationship . . . . .	.42	Why do I have to call you my stepmum?	100
Don't get involved with other people's problems	.46	Excuse me, while I change into my	
Stages of grief. . . . .	.49	Wonder Woman cape	105
Your relationship with your in-laws . . . . .	.53	Caring for someone else's children	109
Take it slow . . . . .	.60	<i>Chapter Five: Stepchildren</i>	115
<i>Chapter Three: Who will be the Hero</i>		The story of Estella	115
<i>in the Blended Family?</i> . . . . .	.63	Children of divorce	119
The story of Alison and Louise . . . . .	.63	The life of a stepchild	125
I didn't know what I was getting myself into . .	.69	Listen to your stepchild's feelings	129
Letting go of resentment . . . . .	.72	I feel like I'm betraying my mum	134
Moving on. . . . .	.75	<i>Chapter Six: Step-parenting</i>	139
Woman up! . . . . .	.80	The story of Jane and Bill	139
The village . . . . .	.82	Setting boundaries and behavioural guidelines	
PART 2: ONE STEP AT A TIME . . . . .	.85	with your stepchildren	144
<i>Chapter Four: The Modern Stepmum</i> . . . . .	.89	Building positive and separate relationships	
The story of Scott and Lina . . . . .	.89	with your stepchild	149
		What makes a successful blended family?. . . .	155

Creating memories and developing your own family identity	161	The story of Susan	231
The divorced dad	169	Relaxing and chilling	236
One step at a time.	176	Pursue your own interests.	241
PART 3: SECOND BEST?	179	Your friends and a soulful community	248
<i>Chapter Seven: Second Marriage, Second Chance</i>	183	Your place in the family	251
The story of Catherine and Peter	183	<i>Chapter Ten: You Can Write Your Own Story.</i>	257
Second marriage: statistics	187	The story of Jenny and Chris	257
Benefits of a second marriage.	193	Share your success and your problems	262
<i>Chapter Eight: Helping Your Second Marriage Work</i>	199	Advance in the direction of your dreams	266
The story of Jane and Bill	199	Sunshine and rainbows and unicorns	268
Having fun	203	<i>Recommended Reading</i>	271
Managing conflict and disagreements.	207	<i>General</i>	271
Sharing goals and shared goals	214	<i>Step-parenting</i>	273
Gentleness and appreciation	220		
PART 4: YOURSELF	227		
<i>Chapter Nine: Keeping a Sense of Yourself</i>	231		

Introduction

When Mark and I got married, I couldn't have been happier. We had a weekend wedding with all our family and friends on the Northern Beaches of Sydney. It was a picture-perfect day, we had my young stepsons in the wedding party, and they did a great job.

We went on a honeymoon to the Whitsundays and it was gorgeous. I remember daydreaming away, thinking about how perfect our wedding was and how happy I was to be Mark's wife. At dinner that night, we met another couple. They started to talk about their children and Mark said, "I also have two children, from my previous marriage." I was blissfully smiling and enjoying my dinner, when the man turned to me and said in a very condescending tone, "Oh, so you're the *second* wife."

I was so shocked I nearly choked on my prawn cocktail. It felt as if I didn't deserve the same respect as a first wife. Then it struck me. He was right. I wasn't just any wife, I was a "second wife." I hadn't even thought about it until, on our honeymoon, I was branded with the "second wife" title. I thought then, *this is how it will always be for me. I'll always be considered a second wife, not just a wife.* That one little word in front of "wife"

actually meant something very different for a lot of other people and I wish I'd been more prepared.

I wrote this book, with the intention that the judgement, prejudice, pigeon-holing and labelling would stop. It doesn't matter if you're the first, second or even the third wife, we're all equal, and we're all worthy of love and respect. This book is all about hope, that opinions and perspectives can be shifted. My hope for you is that you find the faith and believe that things will be different. I believe that things are about to change, and a movement is starting with the blended family.

The second wife is not a second class citizen; she is you and I, and we're here to stay. It's not just the second wives that are judged in a blended family, it's *everyone* inside that blended family. I want to bring this taboo subject to light, and help break down the stigma that hovers over it like a black cloud. You can't control what other people think, or even sometimes say, but we can politely let them know that we may be second wives — but we are second to none!

The Second Wives' Guide will offer you what I didn't have: the resources, the facts, the information, the self-help, and the clear steps and guidelines to putting the pieces of your puzzle together. A study at Stanford University found that 95% of people who hear, understand and agree with a certain principle don't apply to in their lives, because they don't have the necessary resources. I wrote this book to give you those resources: to educate, re-educate, inform, inspire, and share with you the secrets and the necessary resources

to a successful blended family. I want to encourage you to make choices today that will enable you to have a happy, harmonious blended family tomorrow.

The prospect of taking care of someone else's children can be a scary thought. Many of my friends and acquaintances, and their acquaintances, are trying to navigate their way through this challenging task. It's becoming the new norm, though, with more and more blended families being formed every day.

Through this book, I share with you my secrets to being a second wife and stepmother and still having joy and happiness in my marriage and life. I'm fortunate to have a great relationship with my two stepsons, who are now in their twenties and late teens, but those relationships did not come easy and were formed over time. We now have a great blended family, including my own seven-year-old son, Dylan. I want to give you legitimate hope that you can have that too, by helping you understand that it's all about perception and how you see yourself in your family and marriage.

We have had our challenges, like any family. There were times when I thought it was all too much and I wanted out. Mark and I have been married for over ten years and I've been through many dramas and emotions, but the dynamics of our family are really wonderful now.

Anything worthwhile is worth fighting for. I realised years ago that we were all going to be in each other's lives whether we liked it or not — me, the children, the ex-wife, and the wider family — because we're all connected to the same man,

so that bonded us. For everybody's sake, we all learnt to get along and accept one another and our situation.

I love this quote from Oprah: "When you know better, you do better." Looking back on my years as a second wife and a step-parent, I definitely would have liked to have done things better. You can't always know the right thing to do or say in a situation. I don't have any regrets for my life, but I do wish I had handled things differently at times, as most people do.

There are things I wish I knew, that no one told me about when becoming a second wife or a step-parent. I like to break it down into very easy steps and guidelines, whether you're about to take on these roles or are already a second wife. This may help you cut to the chase and do better, without learning every life lesson the hard way. I want to share with you my experiences, and secrets, the highs and lows of being a second wife. I may even be able to help you dodge a bullet or two or three! I want to tell you all the things I wish someone had told me.

This book is called *The Second Wives' Guide* and that's exactly what I want it to be for you — a guide. If you're looking for information, secrets, tips, and advice on a specific topic, feel free to look at what each chapter has to offer and go straight to the relevant chapter to help you. I know how busy life can be and sitting down to read a book from cover to cover may feel a little overwhelming. Dip into it as you need to, curl up with it when you can, flick through for tips or take five minutes to read someone else's story. Just use my

easy guide to discover the tools that you need.

Below are the chapter summaries, divided into four parts. These are the cheat notes, explaining what each chapter contains and how it can help you.

PART 1: MARRYING A VILLAGE

Chapter One: *Tip of the Iceberg* is for any woman who's becoming, or who already is, a second wife or stepmother. This chapter helps you understand that you are not alone on this journey. When you become part of a blended family, you learn quickly that it's not all about you. There are many other people involved, and learning, patience, and empathy will be the key in guiding you through this time.

Chapter Two: *Caveat Emptor — Let the Buyer Beware* is for any women who is about to enter into a second marriage and become a second wife. It covers what to expect, and explains how and why it's important to enter this marriage with your eyes wide open. It gives strong, informative advice on the importance of setting boundaries in your blended family. You will discover why prioritising your relationship is beneficial to your marriage as well as tips and advice on dealing with the in-laws, and staying out of other people's problems.

Chapter Three: *Who will be the Hero in the Family?* Is for any woman who is already in a second marriage and is searching for ways to rebuild her relationships in her blended family and turn things around. It explains why it's crucial to let go of resentment and forgive. You'll discover ways to woman

up and move on. Being the hero in the family means it only takes one person to raise the white flag and surrender, and that others may follow. Focus on being the peacemaker, not the troublemaker. This chapter will have you asking yourself the question, *do I want to be right or do I want to be happy?*

PART 2: ONE STEP AT A TIME

Chapter Four: The Modern Stepmum shows you how to use your role as a stepmum to bring out the best in your stepchildren in their most important years. This is what being a great stepmum is all about. It talks about how to become a mentor and touchstone for your stepchildren and explains why it's important not to become a martyr in your blended family or to be too hard on yourself. It also gives great tips and advice on caring for someone else's children.

Chapter Five: Stepchildren covers what your stepchild wants you to know before you decide to take on the role of becoming their stepmother. It explores their feelings of what it's like to be a child of divorce and helps you empathise with what they have already been through before you came along. It explains how a stepchild can feel when they have a new person in their life that they call "stepmum" and how that works with their relationship with their own mum.

Chapter Six: Step-parenting will help you uncover new ways to set boundaries as a step-parent. You'll uncover the definitive role of a step-parent and how to play it, and figure out how to build a positive separate relationship

with your stepchildren, and how to merge a blended family. This chapter also gives tips for the divorced dad. Through useful practical information that can really help build your relationship with your stepchild or children, you'll be able to see and understand where you may have gone wrong with your step-parenting and then discover simple ways of turning things around and making changes for the better.

PART 3: SECOND BEST

Chapter Seven: Second Marriage, Second Chance encourages you to look at your marriage as a second chance for you, not just for your partner, and every day work on being the best you can be. Second chances are why we get out of bed every morning, an opportunity to try again and make it better than the day before. We have been led to believe that the risk of a second marriage ending in divorce is higher than the first marriage. The truth is the reverse; more second marriages are staying together than first marriages. This chapter also explains the many benefits of being in a second marriage.

Chapter Eight: Helping Your Second Marriage Work covers four points in this chapter that will help you in your second marriage. These will help you to focus on yourself as a person and you as a couple, to prioritise having fun together, and to manage conflict and find resolutions. You'll get tips on the importance of setting and achieving goals together, and learn more ways to show appreciation to one another.

PART 4: YOURSELF

Chapter Nine: Keeping a Sense of Yourself is a crucial part of your journey as a second wife and stepmum. Don't lose sight of what's important to you and what makes you happy. Discover ways to have your own interests in your life, instead of just focusing on everyone else's interests. This chapter explains how and why you should find your place in the family, and make sure you're honoured as an integral part of your family dynamics.

Chapter Ten: You Can Write Your Own Story is all about having the starring role in your life, not being an extra in the background. It looks at the benefits of becoming a part of the second wives' community and sharing your highs and lows. It explains how and why it's important to advance in the direction of your dreams by taking small steps — and never give up believing that the world is full of sunshine, rainbows and unicorns!

I hope the information and secrets in this book will impact you in a powerful, positive way and help safeguard your future as a second wife and step-parent. I'm not saying it's going to be easy, only that it will be worth it!

*Angela Vassallo,
The Second Wives' Guide*

PART 1: MARRYING A VILLAGE

I know what it feels like to have married into a village — but when you first meet someone, all you see is that person standing in front of you. He's the one you're falling in love with. He's the one taking you out for romantic dinners. He's the one telling you he loves you and wants to marry you and spend the rest of his life with you. What you don't see is the village of other people connected to that person, standing right behind him. This may come as a surprise to you, as it did to me. I wasn't ready for all the different dynamics of relationships and friendships that were entangled in my partner's life.

I like to use the metaphor “tip of the iceberg,” because you only see what's on top. You have no idea what lies below or how long and deep that iceberg goes. As you go deeper, you start to realise it's not just about the two of you anymore. A lot more is going on below the surface.

When you become a second wife or a stepmother you become part of a village, where you may be viewed as an intruder or trespasser. It may seem difficult, I know, but your partner or husband is a big part of this village and if you want to be accepted, then you need to figure out how to assimilate into this village without upsetting anyone. Sometimes the people can seem very hostile and you may need to approach with caution.

Don't start running for the hills yet, though. This is the reason I've written this book, from my own experience and that of others, to help you become a

part of this village. The tips and advice that I offer in this book will help you to be welcomed into it with open arms and avoid feeling like an outcast.

Chapter One, “Tip of the Iceberg”, is for any woman who's becoming or who already is a second wife or stepmother. This chapter will reassure you that you are not alone on this journey and that it is possible to have a happy harmonious marriage and blended family. Chapter Two, “Caveat Emptor”, is for any woman who is about to enter into a second marriage and become a second wife. It covers what to expect and explains how and why it's important to enter this marriage with your eyes wide open. It gives helpful tips and advice on how best to start your marriage with clear and honest communication. Chapter Three, “Who will be the Hero in the Family?”, is for any woman who is already in a second marriage and is searching for ways to rebuild the relationships in her blended family and turn things around. This chapter is about doing what's right and understanding that it is bigger than you. Being the hero in the family means it only takes one person to raise the white flag and that others may follow. Wherever you are right now, remember this is the partner you've chosen, it's your life, and you're worthy of love, a fabulous marriage and a beautiful family.

Chapter One: Tip of the Iceberg

THE STORY OF LYN AND JIM

Lyn is an attractive, sophisticated, intelligent and mature woman, respected and well-known in the medical industry. She divorced when her two boys were young. She's been happily remarried for the last decade and loves her life with Jim, a fit man who loves bike riding and enjoys time with his friends and family. Jim is also divorced with two adult children.

As a second wife, Lyn found it difficult to connect with Jim's circle of friends. They just weren't warming to her. She felt the women were always stand-offish and she struggled to talk to them. She believed this was because Jim and his ex-wife Mary still shared the same circle of friends that they'd had for over 20 years. These friends had a long history and perhaps being kind to Lyn made them feel they were betraying Mary. After all these years, though, thought Lyn, and knowing that everyone has moved on with other spouses, why would his friends behave so childishly?

The group of friends often went out for dinners as a group and even went away for weekends together. Avoiding Mary at these events was difficult. Lyn didn't want to miss out on having a social life with Jim, but it wasn't always easy facing the village of friends on her own and feeling like the odd one out. It felt like her old school days, trying to be accepted into the cool group. The hardest part of feeling like an outsider was that all eyes were on her, everyone staring in suspense whenever Mary and her came within a few metres of each other, wondering, *will they talk or won't they? Will there be a showdown, a catfight, or will they just ignore each other?* This unwanted attention was sometimes too much for Lyn to bear.

Mary, meanwhile, is an independent woman, popular and well respected in the community, who enjoys going out with friends and having a good time. She remarried a few years ago and enjoys her life with her new husband. Deep down, however, Mary has always regretted that her marriage with Jim broke down. She'd always seen herself retiring with Jim and travelling together with their friends. They'd been the unbreakable pair, childhood sweethearts, always together, the ideal couple that everyone looked up to. Unfortunately, they'd started to drift apart over the years. Once the children had grown and moved out, they realised they didn't have much of a marriage anymore and agreed to divorce. Of course Mary

understands that she and Jim are divorced and will never get back together, and respects that they both remarried other people. All the same, sometimes she feels sad when she thinks about her marriage to Jim and what could have been. She has nothing against Lyn, who seems a nice person, but her feelings for Jim make it difficult to see Jim and Lyn together.

Without knowing any of this, Lyn decided that the only way for the others to accept her into their social circle was for everyone to see her and Mary getting along. If she made an effort to get to know Mary and try to be friends, she thought, then maybe everybody else would accept her too.

The next morning, the group went on a walk together along the boardwalk. Lyn thought this was the perfect time to make her move. Normally, she would hang back and keep her distance from Mary and her friends, but not this time. She felt the fear and did it anyway! She followed Mary for a few minutes, looking for the perfect timing. An opening came as one of her "bodyguards" (as Lyn thought of them) moved slightly to the left and Lyn pounced.

"Hi Mary, how are you on this gorgeous morning?"

"Fine, thanks." Mary turned, expecting to see one of her friends walking alongside her, but lo and behold, it was her arch-enemy, Lyn. "Oh! It's you," she exclaimed.

“Yes, I just thought I’d come over for a chat and see how you are.”

“Oh, that’s nice.” Mary was clearly taken aback, but open to being polite, at least.

Lyn and Mary walked on for over an hour talking about the weather, Lyn’s boys, Mary and Jim’s children, and everything they could think of. The best part was that everyone saw this.

Since then, there has been a big shift in Jim’s social circle. Lyn feels that they’re becoming more accepting of her. She was even invited to one of the women’s lunches, when the men went to play golf, and had a great time with no sense of animosity or uncomfortable moments. At times she still feels intimidated by Mary and her friends, but gradually less and less so. It’s not perfect and she and Mary will never be best friends, but the next time Jim says they’re going out with his friends, Lyn won’t have that sick feeling in her stomach anymore.

VALIDATION AND DELAYED GRATIFICATION

Becoming the second wife can be like marrying into a village.

One of the biggest inspirations in my life has been Oprah.

I consider her a mentor, because whenever things were challenging in my life, I’d watch Oprah and she’d always say something I needed to hear at that moment. Nothing was more profound for me than her final speech in her last show. In that show, she said something that changed me as a person. It was my “*aha*” moment. She said that in all her 25 years of interviewing and meeting people from all over the world in all walks of life, one common thread ran through everyone was this — the need for validation and the feeling that they’re worthy. Oprah explained that need like this- “Do you see me? Do you hear me? Does what I say mean anything to you?”

Validation is the most important thing that people long for in life. Babies cry for it and grown men die for it. As a second wife, you need to realise that you may not get this validation in your new family for a long time. Don’t expect much from your husband’s side of the family at the beginning. You need to have a thick skin. Things will eventually become easier and the validation you’re searching for will eventually come with time. It’s all about delayed gratification.

Delayed gratification is not a term we’re familiar with these days. We want everything now. The world has become a place where if you want something, you can get it almost straight away. When you become part of a blended family, though, you quickly learn that it’s not all about you. Of course you can’t and shouldn’t delay your own needs forever. Part Four explores how to look after yourself as well, but many other people are also involved. Patience and empathy will be the

keys in guiding you through this time.

When you become part of a family dynamic like this one, you need to know that not everyone will accept you straight away. It may sometimes feel like a lonely road you're travelling, but you're not alone. Millions of second wives all over the world feel just like you. As more and more women are becoming second wives and step-parents every day, it's also becoming more accepted and respected. The more we can embrace our blended families and understand how to manage the situation, the better off we'll be.

This chapter is for any woman who's a second wife or is about to become one. All second wives have a common thread: that validation and delayed gratification will be a part of our lives. Understand that building relationships with people in the village, your husband's family and social circle, is going to take time. Family and friends in the village may have an influence on your relationships at the beginning, but every family has relationship difficulties, not just blended families. The key is to try not to be affected by it and not to lose yourself in it.

POINTS ON VALIDATION AND DELAYED GRATIFICATION

- Don't take everything personally. If someone doesn't greet you or speak to you the way you would like, let it go. It takes time for everyone to accept you.
- For every person that doesn't show you love and acceptance, there are ten that will. You have your own family

and friends that love you and think you're great!

- If you go out of your way to do something for your step-children and they throw it back in your face or don't appreciate it, don't get upset or stop trying. The most important thing is that you tried — and your partner will also notice. One day the children will appreciate it.
- Remember that sometimes other people's problems really haven't got anything to do with you and often didn't start with you. You may simply be an easy target at that moment!
- When it all becomes too much, go and talk to a girlfriend. Don't pour it all out on your husband; he's too close to it all and may take it personally. Instead, see it as a great excuse to get out and have an evening with the girls!
- Don't lose yourself in trying to become the best daughter-in-law or stepmother. Make sure you have your own life, hobbies and interests, and that you take time for yourself.
- Remember that "hurting people hurt people." Children are sometimes confused and angry about a blended family. You may be the target for a while, but it will change.
- Always remember how courageous you are to have taken on this role in the first place. It's not easy, but you did it, you're doing it, and you're a warrior woman!

THE CONCEPT AND CLICHÉS ABOUT THE SECOND WIFE

A recent episode of Dr Phil reported that in the United States, 1300 stepfamilies are forming every day and that in the next 5 to 10 years, there will be more blended families than unblended families. This obviously means there are going to be many more second wives and stepmothers, but the words “second wife” still holds a stigma. That one little word in front of “wife” can mean so many different things. Some people think of a second wife as a home wrecker, the young bimbo that came into the family like a predator and stole the husband away from the first wife. More often than not, though, that isn't the case. The women that are becoming second wives have varied backgrounds, histories, and ideas about marriage. Some are divorcing from their first marriage and becoming a blended family. Some have waited to get married, rather than leaping into a marriage with their childhood sweetheart or the first guy that came along. Some have chosen to put their careers first, instead of having children at a young age.

This last one was definitely the case for me. I wasn't ready to settle down. I wanted to travel, to have a career, to experience life. I didn't want to feel like I was tied down to any one person. When you do marry and have children, you have many more obligations and compromises to make, which I wasn't ready for. Good things come to those who wait. When I was ready, I met a great man and that's why I worked on forming our blended family — because I loved

him and I wanted my marriage to work.

The more I talk to people about second marriages, the more I'm blown away at how many second wives there are. Women who have lovely families and are successful in their own right will blurt out to me, “This is my second marriage I'm a second wife too.” Families I'd always thought were a single unit told me they're a blended family too. The women that I have met and spoken to are doctors, lawyers, business owners and stay-at-home mums. The stereotype of a second wife is changing. We deserve and have earned our stripes, we have paid our dues, and we're here to stay. I want to see more second wives having successful, harmonious blended families and also being able to have a relationship and common ground with the first wife.

YOUR HUSBAND'S SOCIAL CIRCLE: OLD FRIENDS AND FAMILY

One group of people who will inevitably see you as the second wife are your husband's old friends and his family — sometimes simply because they knew and liked the first wife.

CASE STUDY: KATE AND PAT

Kate is a sharp young lawyer, married to Pat, another lawyer. They've been happily married for five years and this is Pat's second marriage. He shares custody of his eight-year-old son, Tristan, with his ex-wife, Andrea. Andrea and Pat were married for nearly ten years, but

Andrea wasn't happy and asked for a divorce. She felt Pat was a workaholic and didn't pay enough attention to her and their son.

Kate has tried desperately to have a relationship with Pat's family, inviting them to events and trying to include them in hers and Pat's lives, but they've shown no interest in welcoming her into their family or even accepting her. Pat's mum even calls Kate "Andrea" whenever they talk, and doesn't even apologise for it. Kate recently found out that Pat's mother and sisters are still in regular contact with Andrea and frequently go out for lunch together. She feels excluded and rejected — which seems doubly unfair, as Andrea ended the marriage, not Pat.

Trying to gain acceptance from the rest of the "village" can be incredibly hard. I've been to plenty events and dinners with my husband's circle where I felt like the odd one out. I felt as if I had to prove myself and struggled to understand why people were so rude. I may have a thick skin, but it was hard and we're only human, so our feelings can get hurt. This is where you need to be careful not to let situations like this poison your relationship. You need to let some time pass — people need to learn to accept your relationship and not judge it anymore.

In the beginning of your relationship, it's wise to tread carefully when it comes to events such as a family wedding. Maybe you aren't invited to Uncle Buck's wedding but your

partner is. Maybe his ex-wife is also going and you're being left out. This can happen. Try not to get too upset, because it may simply be too early for everyone to accept you and get to know you. You may need to sit this one out! There will come a point when enough time has passed that you and your partner need to let people know you're a serious couple, that you want your relationship to be respected, and that you'll be attending as his partner, whether people like it or not. In the early stages, though, the wounds are still raw and people are worried how the new marriage may go down. If this is the first time you'll be meeting your partner's ex-wife, it can be uncomfortable for everyone, especially you.

Old friends in the social circle are another whole other mini-society. It's not much fun being the new kid on the block, trying to figure out who's who, how they're connected, whether they're really close with your husband's ex-wife and whether they'll like you. But you don't need to prove anything to anyone — to your partner, friends, social circle or family. You have no control over what anyone else thinks of you, but you can control what you think of yourself and how you conduct yourself through all this. You may even surprise yourself and find your true strength of character!

POINTS ON FRIENDS, FAMILY AND SOCIAL EVENTS

- Not everyone will want to accept you in the beginning. If you're not invited to something, accept it and move on. If you're invited to an event with your partner's family or social circle, be grateful and go along as a supportive

partner, not to cause drama or problems.

- If you're not invited to something and your partner is, don't sit at home feeling sad and depressed and thinking crazy thoughts. This is a perfect excuse to go out with the girls! Never play the victim — always keep your independence and your own friends.
- If your new mother-in-law or another family member calls you by the ex-wife's name, laugh it off! I did and still do. In the big picture, it means nothing to you and your partner's happiness; everyone is adjusting.
- If your partner's family and friends are all hovering over his ex-wife at a social event and none of them are talking to you or getting to know you, just let it go. Eventually they'll get to know you. It's not a competition. Enjoy yourself with your partner and ignore the rest.
- Remember that no matter what's said to you or how many death stares you get, don't start an argument. You don't want to be seen as the one causing a problem, especially in front of his family. Be a peacemaker, not a troublemaker.
- Don't try too hard with his friends. Just be yourself.
- Don't put the ex-wife down in front of anyone, even if they're saying negative things about her. Try to stay above it. You're building relationships, not tearing them down.

RELATIONSHIP DIFFICULTIES IN FAMILIES

When you're struggling, remember that all families have difficulties, not just blended families and second wives. This person isn't talking to that person and resentment and tension grows. Family dynamics are a strange thing to start with. Sometimes, when you throw extra people from outside of the family into the mix, it just becomes something to direct attention towards other than themselves.

CASE STUDY: PENELOPE AND ANDREW

Penelope's son Andrew recently divorced from his wife. He was devastated and didn't see it coming. When his wife kicked him out of the house, he had no choice but to move in with his mother. He lived with his mother for two years and Penelope loved the company, especially as her husband had died a few years earlier. Andrew met Lisa through mutual friends. She'd also been married before and had three children. They became very close very quickly. Penelope, however, had become very protective and possessive of her son and didn't want to see anyone take advantage of him or hurt him. Lisa could sense Penelope's hostility and was worried that Penelope would get too involved in their relationship. Lisa asked Andrew to move out of his mother's house so he and she could buy an apartment and they could move in together. He did and they got married.

Penelope was heart-broken and felt that she had lost her son. Andrew felt like he'd been stuck in the middle; he'd had to make a choice and he chose Lisa.

There are many layers to families — it's not just the first and second wives that have problems! Sometimes you want or even expect someone to be or act a certain way. Sometimes they don't meet your expectations of what you feel you deserve or should have. But that's life; it happens with every relationship. People don't always live up to your expectations and you don't always live up to theirs either.

You may feel resentful towards your step-kids or your partner's ex-wife for how they've spoken to you or treated you in the past. I know that, for me, some comments from my stepsons upset me, even to the point where I thought "You ungrateful little...!" But I know they're a part of my husband's family, that they're good kids, and that it's not always like that.

This doesn't mean we all hate each other for the rest of our lives. It doesn't mean every time you see that person you struggle with tension and anxiety. You let it go and move on. Remember that you don't forgive someone for their sake — you do it for yourself, so you can have peace in your life.

POINTS ON HANDLING DIFFICULTIES IN FAMILIES

- Handle your emotions. If you feel yourself about to lose it, take a few deep breaths or leave the room. Try not to shout or burst into tears. It's all about your EQ, not your IQ — your emotional intelligence will always help you

through whilst dealing with family drama.

- Sometimes you may need to bite your tongue until it bleeds! You don't need to get involved with every family problem or argument. Sometimes it's better just to sit it out.
- If you're going to confront someone about what they said or did to you, sleep on it. You may feel differently the next morning.
- There's a time and place for your husband or partner to step up to the plate and take responsibility for what's going on in the family. He needs to be the one that sorts out a problem between you and the ex-wife, step-kids or his own family.
- Don't say anything negative about your stepchildren to your in-laws, because they may become defensive of their grandchildren. Better to err on the side of caution, especially while you're trying to build this blended family.
- Don't say anything negative about your partner's ex-wife to your in-laws, either. You may have relationship difficulties with her, but they may still think she's fabulous and perhaps always will, so tread lightly.
- Before you act, think, "is this serving me or is it going to hurt me?" Sometimes when we say things in the heat of the moment, it can have an impact for the rest of our lives.

THE MANY COMPLICATED LAYERS

This first chapter has touched on some of the complicated layers that make up a blended family. It can feel quite daunting once you realise the different levels and dynamics. Over time, instead of seeing the tip of an iceberg, I've started to see all these layers as a rainbow. This is what makes my family and keeps it interesting. It has challenged me as person to get out of my comfort zone and to learn to accept people for who they are.

The relationship between you and your husband or partner is the most important layer of all. Everything else comes after that and relies on that. Don't let the reason you two got together in the first place have all the life sucked out of it because of all these other complicated layers. Remind yourself regularly why you married this person in the first place. It's equally important not to lose yourself through all of this, because that's the person your husband married.

There have been many times over the last 13 years where I've asked myself, "How did I get into this?" But I don't regret it at all. I love having a blended family. It still has its challenges, but as we've seen, every family unit does.

As for the "village" that I married into, I have grown to love it. It definitely didn't happen overnight, but they're now also my family and my friends. As a family, we have all been able to make this blended family work. I can't take all the credit for that; it was a deliberate conscious decision from all of us to get along and work on making this a successful happy

family unit. I'm proud of our blended family and proud of the members in it. Everyone has had to learn to get along, to respect each other, to accept each other, to live with each other, to holiday together, to celebrate each other and to love each other. It wasn't easy, but what is? Life is challenging whether you're in a blended family or not. You may as well just be happy and look for the positives. Some people in the village I'm not that close with and never will be, but that's fine too. We have also made new friends along the way, who have also become part of our "village."

As Brian A. Chalker wrote in his famous poem, "people come into your life for a reason, a season or a lifetime." I've experienced people who've come into my life for a reason or a season, but the ones I spend most of my time with and who I focus on are the ones who are there for a lifetime.