

telling it like it is

Editor's Note: The following five articles have been written by Extension professionals with the understanding that they'd be printed anonymously to make it easier for the authors to "tell it like it is." For some people, these articles will suggest creative ways of coping; for others, it may allow a sharing of feelings of weakness, loneliness, frustrations, etc., with others instead of holding these feelings inside. Perhaps a future issue could continue on the theme of personal concerns and creative coping.

PW

Single Again

How does Extension treat divorce? Well, it seems surprisingly good initially. There was genuine outpouring of concern. I was supported as a staff member much like a family member who's in distress. "The spouse must be wrong to have done this to our 'son.'"

The prolonged pain wasn't understood. It was "get over it," you have work to do. There was little understanding of the profound pain of the grief process. If I hadn't been strong, I might have internalized some of that as guilt. I didn't and continued my struggle through the grief process.

As I moved to being "single again," many assumptions were made that I was "a swinging single." That if I was tired, it was because I must be living it up. In reality, I was trying to juggle an impossible work load with the laundry, the cleaning, time with my children, and fulfilling many chores that had once been shared by another person.

Little time has been available to cultivate friendships outside the Extension family. It has taken concerted effort to develop friendships. These are valuable and necessary. I feel that I must keep close watch to prevent my work family from knowing all that goes on in my personal life. A little information can become distorted in a gossip-oriented organization. For sanity and personal and professional survival, I keep many parts of my life separate from the job and my co-workers.

Never Me!

Being divorced is a state I never thought I'd be in. Ever since I was a little girl, my dream was to be married and a mother. But here I was divorced after 23 years of marriage . . . as a result of my own decision. The divorce came at the end of long years of education and change, and just before taking my job in Extension in another state. My children were into their own lives, and I thought it was time to begin mine again.

I thought the divorce would solve some problems, especially the conflict that was becoming so intense between my husband and me over my right to be myself. I guess I declared independence with the divorce. But, I found independence brought me too many stresses at once; a new location, a new environment and way of thinking, living alone, being a professional—not a student or secretary, and moving away from my children to another state.

And the relationship stresses of the job with Extension were far different from any I'd ever experienced. It seemed to me I was expected to be a complete professional—not a hurting, developing person. And I felt caught in the middle—not a male professional and not a secretary. All the other professionals in the office were men, and they didn't know just how to deal with me. It seemed to me their stereotypes of women were that their work wasn't of equal worth and that they should be married. One of the men told me he couldn't understand why I didn't remarry.

The secretaries in the office also had a problem with my divorced state. Those who were married complained about their problems frequently, but somehow I felt that they saw me as an example of personal failure. In spite of their difficulties, they seemed to value their marriages and asked whether I missed my husband or was lonely.

Yet, all of us in the office have grown and are more acceptant of a divorced lifestyle. I'm about recovered after six years, and have learned to be an independent professional. It has been a struggle for all of us and we've learned a lot. It's been worth the effort.

The mailbox doesn't know
I'm waiting for something,
The phone doesn't know
how I want it to ring,
The bed doesn't know
that it's empty and cold,
The mirror doesn't know
that I'm getting old
The stove doesn't know
that I'm cooking for one,
The book doesn't know
I'm not reading for fun,
The towel doesn't know
it's a "her's," not a "his,"
And you never know
I'm afraid of what is.
—Honey Falconer

The "Real World"

Coming into Extension work from another state can be a frightening experience. Last April I moved, leaving my family, all my friends, and everything I loved behind. Deciding to take this 4-H agent's job was one of the most difficult decisions I ever had to make.

I arrived with mixed emotions wondering if, as a woman, I would live up to the expectations of the job typically held by a man. At first, everyone was reluctant to accept me and my capabilities. I got lonely, depressed, and frustrated. I frequently telephoned home, but long distance phone calls can be expensive, especially if you talk longer than 10 minutes!

Having no relatives or friends in the community to turn to, I reached out to one of the 4-H leaders for friendship. I desperately needed a companion . . . someone to confide in and share experiences with. This relationship only lasted a short while. People stereotyped us together and small talk was rampant. This made life difficult for both of us.

Trying to meet other single young people in the "real world" can be frustrating. I went to the YWCA hoping to make some new friends, but most of their clientele were young children or older adults. Church activities were almost always centered around the family. There really was no place for single people to meet other single people.

Lately my job keeps me so busy at nights and on weekends that there isn't a lot of time for loneliness. However, 4-H comes first and my personal life is always second.

Next month will be my first "anniversary" as a 4-H agent. As I look back at the past year's activities and accomplishments, I feel that I made the right decision by coming. However, outside of the 4-H circle, I still don't have any real friendships in the community where I'm living and working.

Adjusting Is Lonely and Risky

It wasn't that I didn't know anyone and it wasn't that there wasn't anything to do. I knew my co-workers and their families and the people we met for lunch. I knew a few hundred 4-Hers and volunteer leaders.

I had many interests and there was plenty to do to keep me busy. In addition to my job and all of my evening meetings, there was sightseeing, going to auctions, haunting local antique shops, getting my apartment in shape, teaching swimming lessons at the Y, and going to the library.

I hoped there were other single people about my age somewhere close by, but I didn't know where. I didn't know how to find them. I believed that there could be great problems associated with my getting personally involved with co-workers or clientele, so I refused to do that. I believed that 4-H agents had a certain wholesome image to maintain within the community.

It was lonely, though. There were no friends close by. There was no one to laugh with, share things with, complain to, go places with . . . it was lonely.

As the months passed, it became more and more evident that whatever happened was up to me. No one was going to come get me because no one knew me. I was going to have to make the first move.

One single young man I'd met my first month on the job seemed interesting. He said to call him for dinner sometime. It was time. Who knew whom I might meet or what might happen. I'd take the chance.

Married to My Job

To be honest, I interviewed and accepted the position in this county because at the time I was dating (and very serious about) a girl from nearby. I was working towards my master's, but this position opening seemed to be a golden opportunity.

I started on the job in June, and from that time throughout the summer, I had little time to worry about a social life. However, my relationship with my girlfriend fell apart that summer, and when fall came, I was pretty lost.

It was the first fall that I could remember that I wasn't going back to school, and it was hard to get used to. I found myself without my circle of friends and college activities that I took for granted before. I went back to my college town almost every weekend that fall and for a while it was enough to fill the gap.

I knew that I couldn't keep going back, but I couldn't find a circle of friends around here. People my age seemed to be married, and there wasn't any avenue to meet the ones who weren't. So to make up for my lack of friends, I started going to any Extension meeting I could just to keep from spending evenings in front of the TV.

Now I find I'm married to my job. It's about the only thing I have . . . all day, evenings, and as many weekends as I can arrange. I seldom take vacations 'cause there's nothing to do or anywhere to go by myself.

I like my job and I like the county, but I'm not sure how long I can keep going on this way. I may go back to school and finish my master's degree, or maybe try to become an IFYE before I'm too old. I really don't know. I do know that something must change!

Weekends are . . .

cold, while the thermostat says 85 degrees,
dried flowers that die,
4th down, 50 yards to go, 2 seconds on the clock,
sticky tape, that doesn't,
a pop-up toaster, that won't,
soggy Rice Crispies,
to be continued,
6 potato chip crumbs,
dead batteries,
broken shoelaces,
Cracker Jacks without the prize,
crooked pictures,
frozen hamburger,
permanent press wrinkles,
3 strikes, you're out.

All the lonely hours are poured into remembering
All the lonely thoughts poured into trying to forget,
The harder we try to forget, the easier it is to remember,
The past can't die and the future can't live,
but the present exists.

The "was," the "now," and the "can be" are all tangled up in loneliness,
and loneliness is all tangled up.

Days are horrible, nights are unbearable,
and the line between the two is predictable,

Loneliness is endurable, but emptiness is not.

If silence is deafening, then what is quiet?
Quiet is weekends and weekends are Hell.

Wake up and face reality—why?
Weekends enforce reality, weekdays subdue it.

Sunday—the body rests, but where's the
"off" button for the mind?

Saturday—It's a world of 2+2, where 1 has no meaning and no value.
Aren't numbers great?

—Honey Faulconer