

# Living on the edge: Mothers manage responsibilities of going solo

From A1

Richard C. Briggs High School, a part-time job and a course at Norwalk Community College.

"I feel like I have to set an example for (Deshaun)," she said. "I want to show him that he should go to school and graduate and go to college and do better things with his life. I want him to be very successful."

To Huckabee, success means not having to struggle financially. She wants to go to college and become a doctor, a lawyer, or a Web designer.

"I want to be able to give my son everything that I never had. Say my son wants something — right now, I don't have the money for it. I want him to have enough money so he doesn't have to worry like that. I want him to be able to take care of him and his."

Beatrice Huckabee works part-time cooking and serving food at Brien McMahon High School and houses Tangie, 11-year-old Tiba, Tangie's boyfriend, and Tangie's twin brother, when he's not in jail. She helps watch Deshaun when he's not at Briggs' in-school day care, which serves up to eight youngsters and has a waiting list.

"That's my heart," she said, chasing the toddler around a small living room dominated by a large-screen television and equipped with a computer, plastic-covered couch, unshaded lamp and playpen. "He likes 'Meemaw' better than he likes anybody."

She's changed her tune since her livid response to her daughter's pregnancy. She was angry at first because motherhood at 16 is much less reasonable than her own motherhood at 30, she argued.

But age may not have the impact on unmarried pregnancies that Beatrice Huckabee suggested, according to Kelleen Kaye, a family structure analyst and policy expert who is researching behaviors and attitudes toward parenthood for the New America Foundation.

It is encouraging that a nation-

wide push to decrease teenage pregnancy has worked, but the unmarried women who are increasingly waiting until their early twenties to have babies are as ill-equipped for motherhood as teenagers and have less public policy support, Kaye said.

More than half of the women in their early twenties who gave birth in 2004 were unmarried.

"A lot of this problem has just been pushed back to a slightly older age group," Kaye said. "They just kind of fall off society's radar screen but they're still just as lost."

Single parenthood is especially prevalent in low-income neighborhoods and is racially-correlated, as well. Nearly 70 percent of births to black women are outside of marriage.

But some middle- to upper-income mothers have chosen single parenthood and argue that they are perfectly capable of raising children without men.

Even so, society should discourage the unmarried parent trend, Kaye said.

"Even in those (higher-income) families, the children are suffering some consequences," she said. "Of course we should never be vilifying single moms ... but that doesn't necessarily mean we want to promote all pathways into parenthood. There are just intrinsic aspects of having two parents that helps kids thrive. If you have a child who was born into a married parent family, on average, there tends to be more significant parent involvement."

Nationally, children of single mothers are five times more likely to live in poverty than their peers who have two parents.

And the risks of single parenthood stretch far beyond economics. Single-parent households are among the main factors schools and leaders use to define which kids are "at-risk" for undesirable outcomes.

Unmarried mothers are more likely than married mothers to

have low birth weight babies — often associated with a lack of pre-natal care — and have a higher infant mortality rate.

Children who grow up with absentee fathers are at high risk for incarceration, teen pregnancy and dropping out of school. They are more likely to bring weapons and drugs to school, commit suicide, abuse drugs and alcohol, suffer abuse, become violent criminals and need help for emotional or behavioral problems. And they tend to become single parents themselves.

Single parenthood is a vicious cycle that partially stems from "generational unraveling" that gives youths no role models for couple parenting and leaves them to fall back on unrealistic expectations, Kaye said.

"You can start to think about entire communities being transformed with ... marriage virtually disappearing as an institution," she said.

Daughters from single-parent homes are 164 percent more likely than those from two-parent homes to have premarital births and 92 percent more likely to dissolve their marriages, according to the state Department of Social Services.

That doesn't mean some aren't successful despite the statistics, and it doesn't keep all from dreaming of marriage.

"I want to do something big and different," said 16-year-old Brooke Jones, whose single mother, Pamela Banks, works at Malta House. "People come into your life and then they go, they don't always stay. If it (marriage) happens, it happens, if it doesn't, it doesn't — it's just what I want."

Her sister Danielle Jones, 12, wasn't so sure.

"When you're married, you still have your differences, like, you always fight and you have to figure out who pays what bills ... and when you're single you still have to worry," she said.

Banks, 40, said she wishes she'd been married when she got pregnant and she wishes her three daughters had deeper relationships with their father, to whom she was married about one year, but she believes any such relationship "has to be a healthy one" or it's counterproductive. To take care of her kids, she has come to realize, she must first take care of herself.

A Greenwich High School graduate, she is attending nursing school and plans some day to be a doctor. She is using Stamford



Hour photo / ERIK TRAUTMANN  
Pee Jaye Briggs and his mother Mellodye in their Norwalk apartment.

public housing as "a stepping stone" to get there.

Brooke, Danielle and Kyla, 9, — who have big dreams to go to college and become a dancer, veterinarian and fashion designer, respectively — see their dad only "once in a blue moon."

They all wish they had more time with him, but don't feel much lack in their daily lives.

"I like what I have," Brooke said of her mother. "A majority of kids in my school (Westhill High School in Stamford) are living the same way I am (with one parent)."

Many unmarried fathers start with good intentions of being part of their kids' lives, but they usually fall away by the time the youngsters reach age 5, according to the Fatherhood Initiative of Connecticut.

The initiative is designed to

encourage long-term father involvement beyond economic support, with the goal of promoting healthy development, responsible sexuality, emotional, social and physical health, and financial security for kids.

"When fathers are involved, children are more healthy," said Anthony Judkins, who manages the initiative. "The emotional bond gives you so much more. Dads are nurturers ... like moms but they nurture in a different way. They're more than a wallet."

But unlike Kaye, Judkins said marital status is unimportant beyond the financial and legal benefits marriage brings, as long as both parents are emotionally supportive of their children.

Emotional support is hard to give from prison, where the father of Mellodye Briggs' son has been for 11 years.

Briggs married him about three years after giving birth but that didn't last, and their breakup after some three years of marriage left her distraught, hardly eating, and turning to her young son for comfort.

"All I had was Pee Jaye," she said. "I cried on his little chest for seven or eight months. I probably shouldn't have done that, but he held me. That's what I love about him — when everything fails and the chips are down, you still have Pee Jaye."

Pee Jaye, 18, an aspiring rapper who's already released a promotional CD, said he's become a stronger person, the man of the house, by not having his father around.

"It's like a motivation that he's gone because I know that without him being here, I've got to be more focused and stay on top of me," he said. "It's more hard work for my mother so I try to make it easier for her ... (by) not getting in trouble, so she don't have to go through all the things behind getting in trouble, like court dates and stuff."

"My mom, she's a mom and a dad to me. I could say anything to my mom, no matter what it is — sex, anything. She's not like other mothers. She's street smart. If the mom is, like, strong enough to be both a mother and a father figure, like mine, kids don't turn out (bad)."

Does he want to have kids? Yes, but not anytime soon.

And he wants to be married when he does.

"Some things happen by mistake, too, so if you're really not feeling the lady, then I wouldn't get married to her," Pee Jaye said. "Definitely if I have (a child), I'll stay by his side, 100 percent. I'll try to be like a father like no one's ever been to their child."

The past 18 years haven't been easy for Briggs, but they've made her a more resourceful, capable person who stays on her son's back to make sure he's safe and he's doing his school work, she said.

"I put all my eggs in the Pee Jaye basket. We grew up together. It's important that we just do what we have to do, as single mothers, because ... there's progression if you struggle. There is a light at the end of the tunnel."

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# Affordable housing, relocation of YMCA, among top stories in Westport

From A1

need for more affordable housing in town.

In January Joseloff reviewed a proposal set forth by the Joint Committee on Housing to erect affordable units that would appeal to the senior and workforce population, yet still fall under the affordable housing window.

In a past statement Joseloff said "we have more people coming into Westport than leaving Westport to work ... wouldn't it be great to have housing they can afford."

However, with a mill rate of 12.97 percent and escalating

home values solving the housing gridlock may take several years if not decades.

The Planning and Zoning Commission looked to get a headstart on this issue in May when they permitted the formation of the town's first General Business District/Saugatuck (GBD/S), which will allow for the construction of affordable housing units.

Two months after the commission's decision, historic preservationist were hit with a severe blow when New Canaan resident Richard "Chris" Montanaro, principal to Redcoat Development announced plans to raze his 296 Main St. and 5 Gorham

Ave. properties he purchased in 2005 in order to construct a 20 condominium development and earmark 30 percent of the units affordable.

Affordable housing units are residential properties that must be rented to people, whose income is equal to, or less than, 80 percent of the state's medium income, or the medium income of the community, depending on which figure is lower.

Furthermore the developments must be restricted as affordable for at least 40 years from the date of occupancy.

In 2005, the median income in Connecticut was \$77,100.

Hearings on Montanaro's

application to build in what is now the Gorham Avenue Historic District were forcibly closed by the state after an exhausted number of meetings with no apparent resolve.

One month before the Gorham Avenue issue began to gain momentum in June, environmentalist were notified that the 18-acre White Barn Theater was sold to Wilton developer James A. Fieber for \$4.8 million.

The theater once belonged to actress and theater producer Lucille Lortel, who bequeathed the White Barn Theater property to her New York based theater foundation.

Lortel's foundation played a

imperative role in shaping the Westport Country Playhouse, which has undergone a season of changes this year.

The foundation awarded the Playhouse with a \$2 million capital grant to help it reach its \$30.6 million Campaign for a New Era goal.

Shortly after achieving fundraising goals Joanne Woodward, Anne Keefe and Alison Harris resigned from their respective roles of artistic director, associate artistic director and executive director.

Tazewell Thompson succeeded Woodward on Jan. 1 as artistic director.

Though the resounding con-

troversy of the year was not domestic guru Martha Stewart's departure from the town after putting her 3,168-square-foot renovated farmhouse on the market for \$9 million; instead the issue of contention in town remains the Westport Weston Family Y's move to its 32-acre Camp Mahackeno site.

In mid-December CEO of the YMCA Helen Weir, announced the Y was selling its current, 59 Post Road East, facility to Bedford Square Associates, for an excess of \$20 million.

The Y looks to build a \$42 million 102,000-square-foot structure at Mahackeno over the next several years.

# Poll: Americans predict plenty of doom and gloom for U.S. in 2007

From A1

dict a major natural disaster in the country and an equal percentage expects worsening global warming. Also, 29 percent think it likely that the U.S. will withdraw its troops from Iraq.

Among other predictions for the U.S. in 2007:

- 35 percent predict the military draft will be reinstated.
- 35 percent predict a cure for cancer will be found.
- 25 percent anticipate the second coming of Jesus Christ.
- 19 percent think scientists are likely to find evidence of extraterrestrial life.

With Democrats poised to take

control of Congress this week, eight in 10 people predict lawmakers will raise the \$5.15-an-hour federal minimum wage. It would be the first increase since 1997.

Democratic leaders have proposed raising it in stages to \$7.25 an hour. President Bush has said he supports the idea, with some protections for small businesses.

Fewer than half the public think it likely the U.S. will go to war with Iran or North Korea. Should it come down to that, 40 percent think the battle will be with Iran while 26 percent said North Korea.

Higher gas prices, legalized gay marriage and the possible

arrival of bird flu also are seen as being in the cards.

More than 90 percent of people think higher gas prices are likely. A gallon of self-serve regular gasoline averaged \$2.29 last week, compared with \$3 over the summer.

Also, 57 percent said it is likely that another state will legalize gay marriage. Same-sex marriage is legal in Massachusetts; four other states offer civil

unions or domestic partnerships.

People were split on whether 2007 will bring the U.S. its first bird flu case. More than 150 people worldwide have died from the disease. Health officials fear a pandemic if the virus mutates into a form easily passed from person to person.

Women generally were more likely than men to expect some of the more dire predictions to come true, such as a worldwide

terrorist attack and war with Iran or North Korea. Democrats and people under 35 were more likely than Republicans and older people to say global warming will worsen in 2007.

The telephone poll of 1,000 adults was conducted Dec. 12-14 by Ipsos, an international polling firm. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus 3 percentage points.

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