

Perth author writes about the sometimes difficult world of step parenting



Karalee Katsambanis

A changing society has meant an increase in step parenting and step children. With it comes pressure to do the right thing for step children who may resent a new step parent. Settling into a new marriage or partnership along with step children can be high pressure.

"This is the book that I wished I had 15 years ago when I started my step parenting journey," Karalee says. "I wrote it because while there is no one right way to step parent in a step parenting family, there is always one right way to behave when it comes to dealing with people - and that is respect."

Karalee, who wrote the book over a year, says everyone who is separated or divorced needs to remember one important point: "Your ex is your ex but will never be your children's ex. In other words, don't bad mouth your ex in front of your children as your ex will be either their Mum or their Dad."

"Parenting is not a competition, there is room for everyone bringing up children," she says. "But co-parenting with a high conflicting ex really isn't parenting at all,

it is just dealing with unresolved issues that should be dealt with.

"I purposely waited until I had 15 years of step parenting under my belt because I wanted it to be a retrospective rather than a reactive look at step parenting. I also aimed to impart knowledge to readers that is proven to work."

Karalee says her book is also an important read for grandparents who can end up losing or having drastically diminished contact with their grandchildren due to the politics of separation and/or divorce.

"My step children, now aged 26 and 25, are in the book dedication and supported me writing it. I became their step mum when they were 11 and 12." (Karalee also has three of her own children).

"But we move on. How much simpler life would be if a more objective view could be taken initially and this is what I urge people to do throughout the book. Marriage and long-term relationships are a lottery. Just because they don't work out doesn't mean someone is a failure, but it's a failure not to be do-

ing the right thing by the children and parenting is for a lifetime."

Step Parenting with Purpose tackles many of the questions that people are too afraid to ask. It helps people navigate their own, sometimes conflicting, emotions and gives insights into some of the more challenging step parenting events with tips of how to engage and manage the ex.

Karalee says everything in the book is drawn from her own experiences, as well as having witnessed first-hand some examples that have happened to friends. Her book tackles such issues as if someone is on a pension with two grandchildren and a son or daughter meets someone with two children do you (a) call them your grandchildren? (b) Are you obliged to spend the same amount on them, given that they may well have two other sets of grandparents already? (c) What if you don't really feel like you should have to be their grandparent?

Karalee says it has always been rather difficult being a step parent. "You don't dream about being a step parent but many

people say it is a role that chooses them rather than them choosing it.

"One cops all the criticism yet none of the credit. If a parent complains about their children, it's accepted but if a step parent complains about step children they are suddenly Cinderella's wicked stepmother. There are many obstacles along the way.

"Dealing with Child Support Agency (CSA) - most parents want to do the right thing but there are some that don't pay or fiddle their income which makes it difficult for all involved."

Karalee says that she and her husband Peter Katsambanis (Liberal Member for Hillarys) interact terrifically.

"I didn't meet my step kids for almost a year after we started dating. It wasn't that I didn't want to, but friends said: "one day these kids will grow up and move out and if your relationship has been all about his children and not about you as a couple, you might split because you have nothing in common."

"Most step parents want to make a positive difference to their step

child's life but sadly, the political dynamics and blackmailing games that can be played thwart a lot of good intentions.

"A good tip when it comes to disciplining the step kids, try and always leave that to the step children's parent (your partner). Obviously, you don't need to put up with abusive behaviour but let the parent deal with it, that's one way not to be a target."

Step Parenting with Purpose: Everything you wanted to know but were too afraid to ask, costs \$29.95 and is available at Dymocks Karrinyup, Joondalup and Ellenbrook. It can also be purchased from www.karaleekatsambanis.com

by Josephine Allison

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many challenges with few practical guides to navigate the problems that can arise. Hillarys television commentator, journalist, columnist and media trainer Karalee Katsambanis has just released a book, *Step Parenting with Purpose: Everything you wanted to know but were afraid to ask*, which helps explain these issues.

Society promotes friendship through flowers

WEST Australian Floral Art Society Inc is the recognised state body for floral art in Western Australia, operating under the auspices of the Australian Floral Art Association as a not-for-profit organisation.

Meetings are held fortnightly and run for about three hours. They include a brief formal meeting, floral art dem-

onstration, analysis of selected exhibits and afternoon tea. Exhibits are judged by qualified floral art judges. The judges are available during afternoon tea break for constructive comments regarding exhibitor's designs.

Meetings are held on the second Saturday of the month except for January, from 1pm to 4pm with exhibits staged between 12.15pm and 12.45pm

Regular meetings are held at the Osborne Park Activity Centre, 11 Royal Street, Osborne Park (behind BP Service Station, corner Royal and Main Streets, Osborne Park). There is plenty of undercover off-street parking, available at the venue.

Visitors are most welcome to attend meetings for a small fee.

More information is available at the website www.wafloralartsociety.org.au or by calling Penelope Brunning 0403 552 811 or emailing penelopebrunning@yahoo.com.au.

Treat for Perth garden lovers

TWO delightful award-winning gardens will be opening in October to raise funds for the Amanda Young Foundation.

Both have featured on ABC TV's *Gardening Australia*.

Romancing the Stone will be open 3 and 4 October, from 10am to 4.30pm, entry fee \$6. The garden is on the corner of Hawtin and Lilian Roads, Maida Vale. It is a wonderful creation of undulating rock walls, pathways and water features in-

terspersed with an array of colourful plants and shrubs.

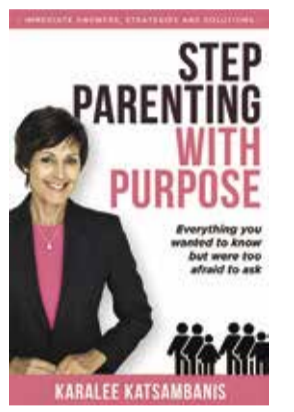
Local artists will also exhibit their attractive work and creator Tom Hogg will conduct guided tours.

Amanda's Garden at the junction of Margaret and Matison Streets in Southern River will open for the annual fete on 24 and 25 October from 10am to 4.30pm, entry \$5.

Set amongst a tranquil natural rural setting of paperbarks, the highlights of the garden are a mass display of Amanda Roses and a colourful array of cottage garden plants. A wide selection of plants, seedlings and condiments is available for sale as well as Devonshire teas and a sausage sizzle.

The Amanda Young Foundation was inaugurated in 1998 following 18-year-old Amanda's sudden death from meningococcal septicaemia.

Full details available www.amandayoungfoundation.org.au.



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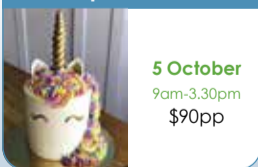
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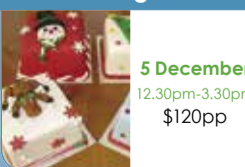
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