

# How Divorce Impacts Farm Families

BY DR. MIKE ROSMANN

About forty years ago the divorce rate of farm couples began to increase and now is about the same as for nonfarm couples. Some rural sociologists blamed the Farm Crisis of the 1980s for elevating what was previously a lower divorce rate for people living on farms and ranches.

It is well known that financial stress, such as many farm families experienced during the 1980s, or at other times, is associated with increased risks of spouse abuse, child abuse, family fighting and divorce.

Relationships can be damaged by farm financial difficulties. In my work as a provider of psychological services to

farm people for the past 33 years, I have observed that the most common reason that farm families seek counseling is to deal with relationship problems that have arisen due to financial stress.

Breakdown of the marital relationship is the most common relationship problem, followed by parent-child relationship problems and relationship difficulties with adult parents. Anxiety issues, depression, substance abuse and other diagnosed problems occur less frequently among farm families, and in the order listed.

There are many reasons, of course, why farmer marriages end in divorce. Rather than concentrate on the reasons why farm couples seek to divorce, I want to focus on the impact of divorce on the partners and their children and ways to reduce the negative impact of divorce.

The unique social and financial aspects of farming make it harder for farm families to separate. Division of the farm property is complicated by emotional ties to the land, animals, equipment and any farming heritage that either person brings to the marriage, such as taking over a farm or ranch that has been in the family.

When the property division accompanying divorce involves a farm that has been in the family for more than a generation, usually the spouse whose predecessors made it possible to own or rent the land is the one who feels the greater attachment to the land. This person feels emotionally indebted to ancestors and wants to retain the property for continued use and to pass it along to successors.

Blame for the marriage ending often gets entangled with the property settlement. One or both spouses may seek compensation for what they feel are sacrifices they made to purchase or operate the farm or ranch.

Sometimes one or both partners may seek retribution for what they feel are wrongs committed by the other spouse. A spouse's extramarital affair, excessive involvement by the partner in farm responsibilities, or blame for debts are examples of such wrongs.

Blaming by a parent about

the other is especially hard on the children. They feel they have to choose sides. The children that hope to take over the operation someday may feel they have to be allies to the parent who inherited, or stands to acquire, the family farm or ranch.

Children don't want to be caught in the middle of an argument between their parents.

They just want their parents to get along. They don't want to show more allegiance to one parent over the other, unless there is good reason, such as victimization in abuse of some type.

Arguing about the property ownership can be removed from the divorce settlement. A prenuptial agreement regarding ownership of farm assets can simplify the division of

farm property. It is a good idea for persons who plan to farm after they marry to consult an attorney or farm business expert to explore the "what ifs."

Most farm couples don't want to devise a prenuptial agreement before the individuals marry. At the time of marriage, they want, and expect, to make their relationship work and they usually don't want to consider sticky issues that imply their partnership might not succeed.

However, when farm persons enter their second or third marriages, they are almost always eager to develop a prenuptial agreement. Having substantial assets at the time of marriage, whether inherited or earned, increases the likelihood of developing a prenuptial agreement.

It is important to remember that a prenuptial agreement can be modified if both partners agree, even after they marry. Having the property division mostly worked out before any unforeseen marriage dissolution is a good premarital plan and can be a useful step toward setting up the estate plan.

Seeking assistance from an experienced divorce mediator, professional counselor or legal advisor is helpful when the divorcing partners have no prior agreement to the property division or child custody. Engaging in structured settlement meetings helps bring the blame issues into the open so they can discuss them in the presence of a neutral third party.

The mediator's job is to ensure civil discourse and equal opportunity by both parties to present their claims and rationales. If there is no mediator, the divorce judge usually takes on aspects of this role.

It is best for partners who plan to be agricultural producers to have a business and prenuptial plan before they marry. It should be part of their marriage preparation.

*Dr. Mike Rosmann is a farmer and psychologist; he and his wife live on their family farm near Harlan, Iowa. Contact him through the website: www.agbehavioralhealth.com.*

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## Visiting Hours

# Packing A Better Sandwich

BY RACHEL PINOS  
Dietitian, Avera Sacred Heart Hospital

Students have been back in school for a little over a month now and we are all getting pretty well settled in our back-to-school routines. One of those routines is packing lunch boxes and at the cornerstone of every lunch box is a sandwich. In fact, a survey done by the consumer research group NPD Group found that 74% of all bagged lunches for school include a sandwich.

Sandwiches are popular in lunchboxes for good reasons. A sandwich is convenient, versatile and can provide good quality nutrition. The bases of a healthy sandwich should be whole grain and lean protein. Adding healthy toppings is another way to sneak in more nutrition. Start with these basics, add a little creativity and willingness to try new combinations and your kids will be packing (and eating) a nutrient-filled and tasty lunch!

### CHOOSE WHOLE GRAINS

- Have your child help pick his/her favorite-tasting whole grain bread.
- Pack a whole grain pita pocket with the fixings on the side. Try shredded turkey and carrots with lettuce. Pack a light salad dressing as topping.
- Put your favorite sandwich ingredients

into a whole wheat tortilla and roll it up for a change of pace. Light veggie cream cheese or light Laughing Cow cheese are great tortilla spreads.

- Use cookie cutters to make shapes in the bread and pack few mini-sandwiches.
- Make "cracker sandwiches" with whole grain crackers, different cheeses and veggies packed separately so your child can assemble at lunch time.
- Use mini whole grain bagels or deli flats to make great sandwiches.

### GO FOR LEAN PROTEIN

- Choose lean lunchmeat that is lower in sodium when possible.
- Combine peanut butter and .....bananas, apple slices, dried apples, raisins or apricots.
- Try almond or sunflower butters as a great butter alternative to peanut butter. Try topping the butter with slivered almonds and dried cranberries.
- Use hummus as a spread or throw chickpeas into your pita pocket.
- Make salad sandwiches with hard-boiled eggs or low-sodium canned tuna.
- Turn leftovers into a sandwich — use chicken breast or meatloaf, and serve with a side of BBQ sauce.

### TOP YOUR SANDWICH WITH TASTE AND NUTRITION

- Top your sandwich with a variety of veggies! Cucumber, lettuce, tomato, sliced peppers, grated carrot, baby spinach, pickles — the options are endless...
- Use avocado or hummus as your spread instead of butter or mayonnaise.
- Use a vegetable peeler to slice cucumber, carrots and zucchini into thin ribbons for sandwich fillings.
- Try fruit toppings on spreads and in salad sandwiches. Golden raisins, sliced grapes or apple slices work wonderfully in chicken salad sandwiches.

Try to get your kids involved in choosing, preparing and packing their own sack lunch. This makes them feel like part of the team and motivates them to eat what they pack and not throw any away. Take this opportunity to teach your kids how to balance less nutritious foods with more nutrient-rich choices by packing only a small portion of the "treat", packing only one treat per day and balancing treats with other healthy foods. With a little planning, you and your child can enjoy a creative, delicious and healthy lunch every day.

# Girl Designs Urn For Remains Of Teenage Friend

BY JEWELL CARDWELL  
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AKRON, Ohio — Leah Weisburn had just been blindsided by the unsettling news of the death of James Bennett.

Like many of her friends and Revere School District classmates, the Richfield, Ohio, girl was emotionally spent.

Hours later, she received a call from James's mother, Sarah Mader Bennett, asking a favor. An unusual and special one.

She wanted 14-year-old Leah to design the urn that would contain the ashes of her long-suffering son — her only child.

James died July 30 at Akron Children's Hospital following a diagnosis 16 months earlier of acute lymphoblastic leukemia. A diagnosis that kept free-falling and tanking into medical difficulties.

Until now, Leah — artist extraordinaire, but oh so shy — has kept quiet about her final gift to James.

After considerable nudging by this columnist, however, she agreed to talk about the role she played in creating the vessel for James' remains.

Weeks later, it's still a tender subject.

The effects of James' journey can still be seen on her face and that of her mother, Hope Weisburn.

"They came in very emotional, of course," Sarah Costic, artist and owner of the Richfield Art Studio and a huge supporter of Revere school students, said about Leah and Hope.

"We stayed up late into the night, sharing stories about his life and exploring what would be the appropriate vessel for him," said Costic who created the urn. "In between crying and sitting around the pottery wheel we decided it needed to be porcelain, the most precious clay."

"This was such a special moment to be invited to be part of," she continued.

"We just wanted this (vessel) to be special for Sarah Bennett and her family," said Hope Weisburn, who is a freelance industrial designer. It's obvious her two daughters, Leah and 12-year-old Hannah, share her artist gene — a talent both have honed with special art classes and workshops.

Like James Bennett, Leah has many layers of interests. Perhaps, that's what was at the core of their strong friendship — the



KAREN SCHIELY/AKRON BEACON JOURNAL/MCT  
Leah Weisburn, 14, sits in the Richfield Art Studio in front of pottery by owner Sarah Costic and other local artists Tuesday, September 18, 2012, in Richfield, Ohio. Leah painted an urn created by Costic for classmate James Bennett, 14, who died in July.

one Sarah Bennett intuitively recognized in deciding to entrust Leah with this monumental undertaking. So sure she could get the job done and done properly. Leah did not disappoint.

The first step was deciding on the shape for the vessel.

"The vessel — which started out from 8 pounds of clay — went through a lot of changes as we talked," said Sarah Costic about the three's time around the pottery wheel.

"It started out more rounded. But as they shared more and more stories I started angling it more, making it more masculine. It actually has a classic Greek-like form with a large belly and fluted top."

It measures 10 inches tall and 8 inches wide.

"Hope and Leah wanted it to be very earthy and sturdy," Sarah Costic continued.

"James loved nature," Hope Weisburn chimed in.

"And he wasn't a commercial, store-bought kind of kid," Leah said knowingly.

"He was a one of a kind," she

added, her words trailing off.

James — after the initial diagnosis in April 2011 — underwent a bone marrow transplant.

Then there was a diagnosis of adenovirus (a complicated infection in the respiratory system), the removal of his colon and encephalitis (a swelling of the brain).

Remarkably through it all, he managed to maintain a positive "pushing forward" attitude.

He was genuinely grateful to everyone who ever did anything for him — the medical staff at Akron Children's Hospital, his family, of course, and his friends he kept in touch with online. He also developed a special friendship with Barbara McKelvey and her partner Sammy, a rescue Bichon, who regularly volunteered with the Delta Society's Pet Partner Program and Akron Children's Hospital's "Doggie Brigade." Sammy is assigned to the hospital's oncology unit, where he met and befriended James.

Even as life was slipping away, James turned his attention to the

well-being of others evident in his final message to the at-large community:

"Mommy and Daddy, thank everyone for the well wishes, prayers and good karma ..."

"Please ask them to donate blood, platelets and bone marrow."

Before cancer took him hostage, James was active in a number of things. His greatest joys were being outside, practicing archery with his bow and arrow and woodworking.

He also loved playing baseball and soccer, horror movies, zombies and dogs.

The self-driven Leah — who is in honors classes and academic clubs, golf, band (vibraphone and oboe), Student Council and more — had the lofty goal of capturing her friend's essence on his urn.

Hope, camera in tow, accompanied her daughter to the Bennett home to help with the research.

They learned from James' mother that he always sat on a sofa by the front porch. The view was of a Japanese maple tree from his window.

Ultimately that was the design Leah settled on.

She created a template from her mother's photo and traced the tree's design on the urn.

"I did a basic outline of the trunk," Leah explained, painting and building levels of the tree.

The tree — which wraps around most of the vessel — is brown with red leaves. The background is light blue with white clouds and green grass.

Near the top of the tree is a white dove. In cursive is the word "Peace," which speaks so poignantly to what those who knew and loved James wanted for him after such a long struggle.

The dove underscores Leah's overall inescapable message "moving upward and onward ... free," Hope Weisburn added.

## Outlaw Trail Ride And Trail Challenge Clinic Planned For Valentine

The Outlaw Trail Scenic Byway and AQHA/NQHA Trail Ride Program will co-host an Outlaw Trail Ride and Trail Challenge Clinic on Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 13-14, at the Niobrara River Ranch, Valentine, Neb.

Pre-registration is required by Oct. 8. All riders will receive a commemorative Outlaw Trail scarf and have the opportunity to purchase the Outlaw Trail tee shirts, the Byway book "Legends and Lore of the Outlaw Trail" and a Travel CD. In addition, riders will receive points toward the AQHA/NQHA Trail Ride Program and there will be drawings for prizes and a special horse race.

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