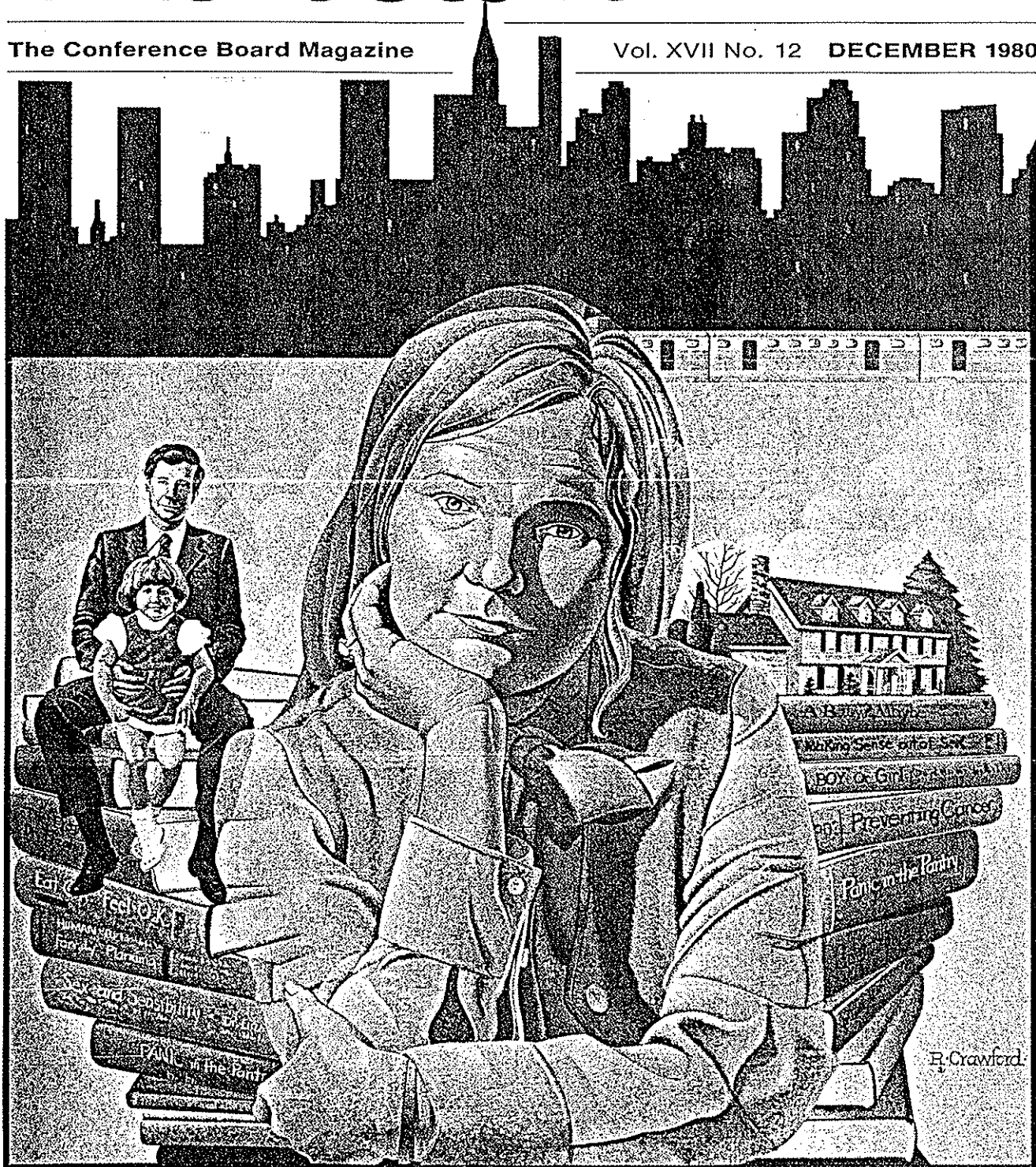


How to heat a New York brownstone / The 'formless fear'  
for \$540—all winter / that haunts America

# across the board

The Conference Board Magazine

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## CONFESSIONS OF A 'SUPERWOMAN'

# CONFESSIONS OF A 'SUPERWOMAN'

She had it all—

Yale, Harvard, career, successful husband, baby,  
New York apartment, beach house, dream house. . . .  
But it wasn't working. Why?

By Elizabeth M. Whelan

Shortly before my graduation in the early 1960s from high school in suburban Larchmont, New York, my social-science teacher asked our class to set forth, on one page, what we hoped to get out of life, and describe where we would like to see ourselves 20 years from that day. I remember my response well: the achievement of four goals. A good education. An intelligent, career-oriented husband. A child (maybe two or three). A beautiful suburban home, just like the one my parents had. By my mid-30s, I explained to my teacher, I expected to be a happily married, college-educated mother living in a charming house and, I hoped, with enough outside interests to be a contributing member of my community.

Now, at age 36, not only have I met these expectations, but I am playing so many different roles that even my highly elastic nerves have been stretched to the snapping point. My story, of course, is mine alone, but I believe it is one testimonial to the enormous conflict experienced by those of us American women, 25-40, who are pulled in one direction by a career and in another direction by the traditional All-American Dream, Female Version.

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## Goal #1—Education

At Connecticut College I got good grades—academically and socially. It was an easy-for-me four years. Yet somewhere along the line I experienced an unexpected surge of ambition. The feminist movement was not yet in full swing at that time—the mid-1960s—so I was not responding to *that* pressure. Rather, I began simply to recognize some of the benefits that training for a career might yield. When I explained to my parents that I wanted to pursue graduate training at Yale, they were enthusiastic. They saw it as a good, practical decision: I had no ring on my fourth finger, left hand, at that point.

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My father, a corporate lawyer, had particularly encouraged me to qualify for some type of work "just in case," pointing out that my grandmother's training as an elementary-school teacher had proved to be a tremendous asset when her life changed and she had to support herself. So graduate school sounded fine. And Yale sounded even better, what with all those prospective husbands on campus.

In the fall of 1965 I enrolled for a master's degree in epidemiology and public health at the Yale School of Medicine. After graduating, I was admitted to a doctoral program at the Harvard School of Public Health. Many friends and family members seemed to assume that, for a woman, graduate school was a way of marking time until her man came along. Actually, I was becoming committed to my new life goal: a professional career.

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## Goal #2—Husband

Just when my relatives were beginning to worry, my ideal mate came along—Steve, a Princeton man, who was a law student at Harvard when we met. We were married a few weeks before our June graduation. We had a life plan: rent a New York City apartment, work hard and play hard for two years, save money, buy a beautiful suburban home and start a family. Between the lines of the script, probably, was the notion that Steve was going to make a lot of money and I would take some time off while the kids were growing up or work part-time. Anyway, we certainly saw no tension between my being a wife-mother and the ambitious holder of a doctorate.

Combining marriage and homemaking with a career seemed to me an easy juggling act. I was moving ahead with my work, just as Steve was. And, true to tradition, I accepted the idea that Steve had a Career and mine was essentially extracurricular. My income, considerable as it was, was thought of as extra money that we should never count on. Homemaking was a form of diversion and relaxation for me after a day at a desk or the library. Our two-bedroom apartment was relatively easy to keep in

# The Author's Scrapbook



← Parents' home in Larchmont



← Graduate of Connecticut College, 1965



Marriage to Steve at St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, 1971 →

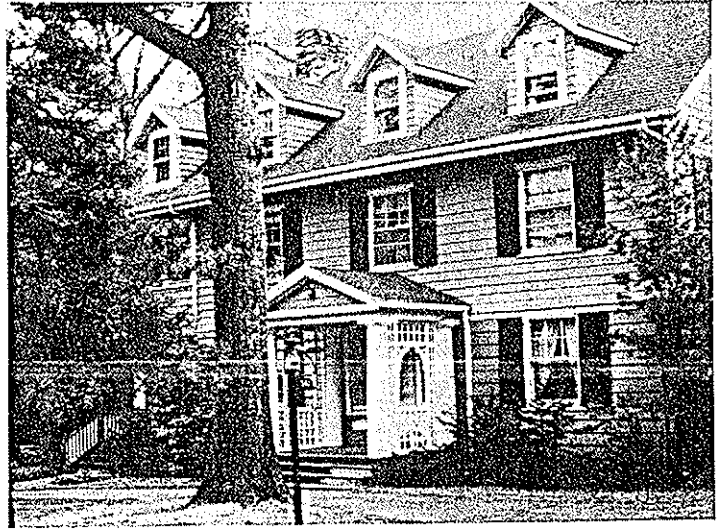


JANUARY 1979  
American Baby



← Receiving master's degree at Harvard, 1968

With daughter Christine, age 1½, Jan. 1979



*The dream house in Short Hills, N.J., 1980*

*With Sandy Hill on "Good Morning, America" (ABC TV), 1977*



*© 1979 Mimi Cotter, People Weekly*

*At the beach house, summer, 1979*

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## Power of the family

The great values for which the family stands are at odds not only with those of the women's movement but also with those of today's world. Democracy, individualism, and meritocracy, the values most closely identified with the last two centuries of Western history, are conspicuous by their absence from the family, even with its present modifications. Just because these modern values have been absent from the family, some commentators have called for the end of the family, or at least have predicted its dissolution on the ground that it is anachronistic.

But that conclusion is based upon only half the evidence, so to speak. For if the family, unlike the women's movement, does not reflect modern values, it does embody values that inhere in great social movements like nationalism, ethnicity, racial allegiance, and the great religions of the world. For those movements extol hierarchy and scorn equality and meritocracy. The family, in short, like the great traditional movements, is an anti-individualistic institution. In fact, its denial of individualism is the source of the family's strong attraction for many men and women

today. For at least two centuries the best known alternative to the individualism, competitiveness, and egoism that infuse the modern, industrial and urban world has been the family. That has been its strongest appeal as individualism spread from country to country in the wake of commercial and industrial capitalism. As an ideal, at least, the family was truly a "haven in a heartless world," to use the title of Christopher Lasch's recent book. That is also why all the great utopian visions of the 19th and 20th centuries from Marxism, which is the most familiar, to the hippies of yesterday have taken the family as their model of human order. In the face of an individualistic market economy, the family has seemed the epitome of true humanity and interrelatedness. The very slogan of Communism—"from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs"—is not only the antithesis of a market economy's conception of human relations, but the central principle of family life. In short, aside from the evidence that Americans still consider the family a central institution in their lives, the very values for which it has stood over the

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order. Getting there at 7 P.M. left me plenty of time to prepare a leisurely three-course reasonably gourmet dinner (I had taken courses at a cooking school). Following a careful schedule, I found time to write books, articles, consult for various health organizations, teach public health courses *and* do all the homemaking chores: remember the birthday cards and gifts, answer the social correspondence, plan dinner parties for the weekend, check the local department stores for sales, furnish and decorate the apartment, buy and repair socks, underwear, shirts and assorted garments for both of us, see that the laundry was done and the window cleaner/painter/repairman was engaged, let in and paid. When I went on extended business trips I would pack up individual dinners for Steve, putting them in the freezer and leaving typed directions on the refrigerator door about what was to be eaten when and how long it should be cooked.

I considered all wifely duties as a manifestation of my womanliness, as easily given as a smile. It never occurred to me then that any tasks required to maintain living quarters used by two equally serious professional people might somehow be equally shared. I harbored no resentment that my burden was somewhat more than Steve's. I was compulsive about doing both of my jobs well, and dedicated to the principle that a good wife's first ambition should be to keep her husband happy. Life was in balance, all was well. Ah.

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### Goal #3—Baby

Steve and I had agreed to go into the baby business after about two years. But when that deadline came along, we began to deal with the question of parenthood the way most intelligent, educated, career-oriented couples do these days: we ignored it. Somehow the time for having a child just didn't seem right; we were both making good salaries, but between taxes and the costs of our high standard of living, we had not saved as much money as we had expected; the idea of moving to the suburbs at that point suddenly seemed premature (and everyone knew you didn't have a baby until you had a suburban house to put it in). Steve was an associate with a New York law firm with high hopes of being made a partner someday. No chance he could leave the office before 7:00 at night. Easy calculations would place him in the suburbs around 9 P.M. No, we weren't ready for that yet.

"We need more time for ourselves," we rationalized. Having traveled extensively in our first two years together, we began to explore some spots closer to New York, and soon became regular weekend migrants to the beaches of southern New Jersey. We bought our own small oceanfront fun house. A "fun house" is to be distinguished from a "real house," which is where you live and entertain and where you display your china, crystal and silver. The beach house was just a place to crash on week-

years suggest that it will endure.

Simply because the family is deeply imbedded in American life and is unlikely to fade away, tension between it and the individual interests of women was inevitable. For some two centuries now, Americans have seen that tension rising. Most recently, with the movement into work of married women and particularly with the rise of the women's movement, the tension has reached a new height. Philosophically and practically the family and women's individuality are difficult to reconcile. Many women today find the realization of themselves as persons impossible to achieve within a family situation. Yet most women still consider a family relationship more important to them than the realization of their own individuality. Obviously, how any individual woman perceives her future is up to her. The family, after all, is at bottom nothing more than a relation between a man and a woman and their offspring. What they work out for themselves as a mutually satisfying relation today depends in large part upon them. For some people that will mean a continuation of the established rela-

tion, with perhaps an opportunity for the woman to work outside the home, though for supportive rather than individualistic ends. For others it may mean abandoning family entirely in pursuit of complete individual fulfillment. The ideal goal, it would seem, would be one in which the values of family and the realization of women's individuality could be reconciled.

Will it be possible for women and men to work out some arrangements—call it family or something else—in which these two goals can be realized? Or must the historic drive for women's individuality stop short of full realization in the name of children, husband, and family? Never before has the tension been so evident or the room for maneuver so narrow. After two hundred years of development, both the future of the family and the fulfillment of women as persons are at odds as never before. Presumably a resolution will come in something less than another two centuries.

—From *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* by Carl N. Degler. Copyright © 1980 by Carl N. Degler. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

ends. Now the pattern was: intensive work all week, dinner out with our friends or Steve's clients (I wasn't cooking so much any more), into the car at 6 P.M. Friday and onto the Garden State Parkway for the two-hour ride to ocean breezes, thundering waves, and a chance to recover from exhaustion.

The baby question hung over us like a threatening cloud, or rather over *me*. Steve seemed interested in having children but on a someday-later-maybe basis. I was the one who was worried about reaching 30 (my mother, a quintessentially traditional homemaker, never missed an opportunity to remind me that I was no spring chicken and better use what Mother Nature gave me before Father Time took it away). A popular insurance company ad—the one that tells you “The future is now” made me nervous: it showed a happy young couple walking down the aisle and within six quick scenes, they were in rocking chairs. Panic. Ambivalence. Anxiety. Pressure. Why was I hesitating to have the child we had planned and talked about years before?

Because my life was so different from what I had expected in my adolescent, goal-setting days. The fact that I would be included in Marilyn Machlowitz's book, *Workaholics: How to Live and Work With Them*, gives a hint about the importance I attached to my job. At age 30 I had published five books and was developing a reputation in the field of public health. I was dedicated to writ-

ing about issues relating to chemicals, nutrition, the environment, and human health and to organizing the work of a group of scientists in those areas.

I attempted to resolve the question of whether to have a baby in the only way I knew: I looked for books to help me to decide. When I couldn't find one, I wrote one: (*A Baby? . . . Maybe: A Guide to Making the Most Fateful Decision of Your Life*, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976). And after weighing all the pros and cons, we (more correctly, I) decided yes. Tradition!

I knew that a child would mean I'd have less time for the professional work from which I derived so much satisfaction, but in return I'd be gaining a whole new vantage point on life, experiencing emotions, activities, pleasures and pains that I would not otherwise know. I had always enjoyed family life. And when I sat back to assimilate the facts I'd accumulated in my baby-maybe research, I began to want a baby for all the “wrong” reasons you see on Planned Parenthood bus posters. I began to wonder with whom I'd spend holidays 30 years from now. Who, besides Steve, could I consider my family when I was 60?

In choosing to become a mother, I took a leap of faith. I remember reading a comment Mme. Curie's daughter Eve made about her mother (one of my heroines): “The idea of choosing between family life and the scientific career did not even cross Marie's mind. She was resolved

to face love, maternity and science and to cheat none of them. But by passion and will she was to succeed." I, too, planned to succeed.

Christine Barrett Whelan was born on July 5, 1977. At that point I was 32, a Research Associate at the Harvard School of Public Health, Executive Director of the newly formed American Council on Science and Health, contributing editor to three magazines, regular contributor to about eight others, moderator of two nationally syndicated radio programs and coauthor of a nationally syndicated newspaper column on nutrition and health. My eleventh book was about to be published. Just before Christine's arrival we had the good fortune to find a larger apartment and a wonderful baby nurse who agreed to arrive each morning at 6:30 and stay until I got home at 6:30 or 7:00. I had decided, after reading all the recognized books on motherhood, to take off a few months after the birth. That decision was short-lived. The day I went into labor, I left a calm, even-spoken message on my phone-answering machine, leaving the hospital's phone number for anyone who wished to reach me. (Potential funders for the American Council, not fully understanding why I was in the hospital, actually had me paged in the labor room.)

I was back at my desk five days after Christine was born. Then the Career/Husband/Baby balancing act began. We cut back substantially on our social life, preferring to be with Christine rather than at Lincoln Center or sharing cocktails and dinner with friends. I stopped shopping at department stores and instead ordered by mail. I refused all but the most critical luncheon engagements in favor of a sandwich or salad at my desk, thus increasing the probability of my being home by 6:30 (my office was two blocks from the apartment).

So I had three roles—scientist, homemaker/wife, and part-time mother—and I began to feel the strain. I need more help, I told Steve, and he fully agreed. All along I had really been opposed to asking for his assistance, again the victim of my traditional upbringing that housework is wife's work and, "Men work hard at the office all day and should be pampered when they get home." We finally abandoned the charade that my career was fun and games on the side and we began to make parenting the joint effort of two working people. Steve began doing the dishes, helped clean the apartment, shop, and generally pitch in. The pressure eased (I was getting help to the point where Steve and I would write each other daily memos on "things to be done") but the balance was nowhere even. The more structured nature of his job meant that the main duties of family life still fell on me. If Nanny couldn't make it to work one day, it was I who had to stay home or find a substitute. I paid for Nanny out of my salary. After all, it had been my decision to trade my "natural" job for a substitute one and I believed I should

take care of the costs of my surrogate. All of this is not to suggest that Steve was anything but a hardworking, contributing father and husband—he is and was all of that and more. But in any partnership, one person has to take the lead in keeping things on track. Here, and in almost every other two-career family I know, the woman does just that.

"How do you do it?" friends and associates would ask me. I would smile calmly, looking quite self-assured, hoping they wouldn't notice that I was wearing last year's dress because I didn't have time to shop and it's hard to choose clothes from a catalog. There were others who asked me in order to challenge me (implicit in their question was a sense of hostility and the feeling "I don't have both a career and a baby and you shouldn't either"); I would simply smile and say it was as easy as could be.

The Career/Husband/Child combination was still working; the condition of the patient was stable.

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#### Goal #4—A Home

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For me, life in our New York apartment had the aura of a black-and-white movie. I wanted to burst into technicolor, with the sparkle and glamour of a HOME. Every time I made a deposit in our savings account or bought some extra linens on sale it was for The House. I even had a separate account earmarked for furniture. It never occurred to me that we might never have The House.

Steve was not happy about the prospect of leaving our city apartment, arguing that our busy professional lives plus Christine did not fit into a suburban life-style. But my arguments were clinchers. *First*, living in a nice suburban house with a garden and backyard would make our lives easier and more relaxed. *Second*, as my mother always told me, we'd be more secure if we'd move out of the crime-ridden city. *Third*, we really owed it to Christine; she needed a backyard, fresh air, friends, swings, a playroom, swimming pools nearby, and a nice little school she could walk or bike to. *Fourth*, WE deserved it! We worked hard and it was time we had some nice things like a dining room, fireplaces, a big modern kitchen, lots of guest rooms, a place to entertain and begin acting like real people who had formal parties, informal weekends, and kindhearted neighbors with whom you traded gardening lore, small favors and family recipes, who stopped in while you were squeezing orange juice and turning omelettes on Sunday mornings and who could be counted on in emergencies. *Finally*, a house was in our life scheme. We'd been working and dreaming about it for so long. It was necessary to make life complete.

I began studying *The New York Times* "Sunday Real Estate Section" as if I were preparing for a final exam. After several months we found—and immediately bought—the Dream House. Center hall, Colonial, a tradi-

tional dining room with a magnificent fireplace, family room with wet bar, modern kitchen complete with microwave oven, trash compactor, disposal unit, ice-in-the-door refrigerator and lots of counter space, seven bedrooms, four-and-a-half baths, an acre of flat green land, all of it unsettlingly similar to my parents' home. In the fall of 1980 we packed up our belongings and moved to Short Hills, New Jersey, although at Steve's insistence (perhaps a premonition of what was to come) we kept our New York apartment. Indeed, to help ease the transition, we agreed to drive into New York each Thursday morning with Nanny and Christine and stay through Friday night, at which point we would go to the beach house. It sounded so simple, so enviable, so . . . jet set. A beautiful home in the country, an oceanfront cottage, a pad in the city, a wonderful husband, child and Nanny, a rewarding career. In retrospect, I realize that unconsciously, I had tried to fulfill the traditional aims while keeping a firm grip on my career. I was intent upon having it all and doing it all well.

Things rapidly went downhill from there. (I began to appreciate Irving Kristol's observation: "The real disasters in life begin when you get what you want.")

*I wanted a house to make our lives easier, more relaxed, out of the rat race of the city, to make us become more human and sociable.* The exact opposite occurred. We were more programmed than ever, commuting a minimum of three hours each day for each of us. By the time we moved into the house, I was not only juggling the directorship of the American Council, its 20 employees and half-million-dollar budget; the Harvard appointment; the magazine articles; newspaper column; radio shows; but also had become a daily contributor at the new Ted Turner Cable News Network, appearing daily on international television. I rushed between the cable studio at the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan, Short Hills, my New York apartment, my New York office—and Newark airport from which I was whisked off at least eight times a month to near and far places.

Grocery shopping became a nightmare. While other women moved quickly through the aisles with their carts and coupons, I was fumbling with three different shopping lists, three different carts or baskets, with Christine opening whatever package she could get her hands on. Inevitably I would have 12 rolls of paper towels in Short Hills and none at the beach or in the city. We had to keep a calendar handy at all times to figure out where we were sleeping that night. We were the only family I know of who received four census forms: one in our apartment, one at the beach house, one in the suburbs—and one at the hotel in Hawaii where we were on business on counting day. Steve and I had talked about the possibility of having a second child, but decided no because we might misplace it.

*I wanted a house to be secure, away from the fears of Manhattan.* Three weeks after we moved to Short Hills our home was ransacked. From that moment, I never felt safe there. Our 20th floor apartment in New York had one door, solid and well bolted. Even Spiderman would have trouble making it to our terrace. Our spacious house had three doors and any number of basement and ground floor windows. After the robbery, on the nights when Steve was away on business and Christine, Nanny, and I were alone in that big house, I was terrified in a way I have never known.

*I wanted a home to make Christine happy, to give her all the benefits of suburban living that I had.* From the moment they arrived in Short Hills, she and Nanny were miserable. They were, in Nanny's words, "virtual prisoners". When Steve and I left at dawn, they were alone, without a car, until we returned at 8:00 or 9:00 at night. Now that Christine was in the ideal environment she hardly ever saw her parents. We kept her up way beyond the bedtime of most two- or three-year-olds. But during the week that still meant our seeing her for only an hour or so a day.

Why, I frequently asked myself, had I insisted on buying a suburban home? Was it really the walls, floors, rugs, the ceilings and furniture? To a small extent I realized the answer was yes; I did respond to the roominess of a house and the beautiful furnishings. But the problems we experienced in the house in Short Hills taught me what it was that I had *really* valued about my own upbringing in the equally attractive house in Larchmont—the warm, intelligent, secure human relationships I found there.

*I wanted a home so we could meet people, entertain, enjoy nice things, and at last stop being working robots.* My fantasy was to have an elegant dinner party as often as possible in my beautiful dining room with a crackling fire warming us. In reality, of course, we were never home long enough during waking hours to meet anyone we might invite to join us at the table. Steve had become a partner at the Wall Street law firm of Thacher, Proffitt & Wood, but his hours were sometimes even longer than they had been during his days as an associate. For us, it became increasingly apparent that the house was something we were either working to pay for or traveling to get to.

One night a major electric storm shut down the railroad, leaving Steve stranded in a remote area about 10 miles away. Trees were down, blocking main roads, and I felt helpless in mapping a route to pick him up. I had no one to call for help. Because I was away all day at work, I was a stranger in my own neighborhood.

At this stage of my life, the only way I could possibly keep track of what was going on and assure myself that I was where I was supposed to be was to keep a calendar close at all times and have a typed data sheet available for each day. A typical one follows.



## WEDNESDAY

- 5:30 Up.
- 6:15 Steve and I leave house (let's drive to work; PATH trains still on strike).
- 7:00 Arrive at Y. Swim. Attempt to fix up and look human.
- 8:00 Get to office.  
Read morning papers.  
Proofread and send off article for this month's *Weight Watchers* column.  
Proof and send out this week's *Food and Your Health* columns.  
Rehearse today's TV scripts.  
Scan and clip *New England Journal* and *JAMA*.  
Order new snowsuit for Christine.  
Check with MD on Christine's cough.  
Call Bill to accept speech for October.  
Find out when Dave will fix washing machine.
- 9-10 Meet with MK to go over fall newsletter; are book reviews, articles and interviews done? Brainstorm on lead story. Work out, mock up, and time frame.
- 10-11 Meet with Anne on budget; status of foundation requests; salary review; new prospects for raising money; membership drive; sales of reports, etc.
- 11-12 Read *Wall Street Journal*.  
Answer mail (20-30 letters).  
Return morning phone calls.  
Ask Grandma if she can take Christine next Wednesday; Nanny has to go to doctor.  
Check to see if Lady Fingers Agency can send someone to clean house Monday.
- 12-2 Tape 20 television segments for Cable News Network.
- 3:00 Back to office; return calls.
- 3:30-4:30 Review and critique scientific position paper on caffeine; suggestions to Beverly for next draft, publishing it, etc.
- 4:30-5:30 Work with Terry on saccharin paper. When will final draft be done?
- 5:30-7 Write this month's column for *Family Weekly* (fad diets).  
Prepare first draft of Council's Annual Report.  
Make sure paychecks are in.  
Pay personal phone bill, gas and electricity.  
Call Joe in San Francisco to accept speech for December.  
Write 10 radio scripts.
- 7:00 Meet Steve at car.
- 8:00 Home.
- 8:15 Quick shopping.
- 8:45 Play with Christine.
- 9:30 Start dinner.

## The End. And the Beginning.

It was all wrong. I finally had to acknowledge it. We weren't living. We were existing much the way a computer does when it is plugged in and switched on. But why was it wrong?

When I took the time to think it through calmly, the analysis was pretty clear. I was trying to lead two very different lives. I wanted to be both the caring, tireless, suburban wife and mother my mother was, and the ambitious, achieving, competent and respected professional career woman I was trained to be. It is with considerable pain and humility that I began to admit the clashing reality.

But no sooner had I made the admission than I rejected it. If we got rid of the apartment and eliminated the daffiness of running around to three residences, would that help? Certainly. Attempting to live in three places obviously had an unsettling effect on Christine as well as on us. At one point this fall she approached me with a very troubled look and asked, "Mommy, this year will Santa Claus come to New York or New Jersey?" But even if we eliminated the apartment we would still have to deal with the daily commuting and the isolation of Nanny and Christine in the suburbs. Would it be possible if we replaced Nanny with a full-time live-in housekeeper with a driver's license, who could do everything—cooking, shopping, cleaning, chauffeuring and taking care of Christine? I doubt that such a person exists. Anyway, more important to me than a spotless kitchen and dustless coffee table was the certainty that Christine was encouraged to read, paint, sing, and play. And Nanny did that.

Could I keep this show from folding if Steve assumed more of my tasks? Not really; he, too, was caught up in the work-family cycle: getting home after 8:00, up until midnight paying bills, looking for screens for the kitchen windows, trying to figure out why the ice maker didn't work, rewiring the stereo speakers, and then up again at 5:30 A.M. You might well think that a career man married to a career woman with a large income just had to be a big winner. Actually, his life might be easier if his wife were home all day, cooking, cleaning, caring for baby, and arriving with fresh makeup to meet him at the 8:07. Indeed, the comparison of the extra cash and pride in an achieving wife versus the serenity that might be part of a traditional mother-at-home situation might come out as a near even draw.

Would it work if I abandoned my career and stayed home? Emphatically *yes*—except, of course, for my frustration at wasting my professional training, and for the reality that without two salaries we couldn't have supported our life-style. Even so, that second salary is something of a trap for working mothers. We must pay for the help that replaces us in the home with after-tax dollars, so

that even if you are a top income producer, you can't afford that much help.\* If, for example, a New York husband and wife make very large incomes, say \$70,000 each, they pay two thirds of the total \$140,000 in taxes (the sum total of Federal, state, and local taxes). That means the wife has about \$24,000 left of her income after taxes. A good baby nurse in the New York area, once you've added in Social Security and other benefits, costs a minimum of \$12,000 a year. Half of her salary, then, generally goes for child care before she can ever think about paying cleaning help, car pool and nursery school bills, not to mention the normal expenses of working, like wardrobe costs and commuting.

Through all the dialogues and soul searching I did about juggling my various jobs and family, I was avoiding facing up to what is an embarrassment in feminist circles but a real and brutally threatening question: *Can you be both a successful wife and mother and a successful career woman? Is it inevitable that one or the other will suffer?* The question is certainly appropriate for men too—but is particularly telling for today's working wife, who is the one more likely to have a dual role. The modern women's magazines tell of the joys of shared household tasks and childrearing and advise you to have your husband work part-time, so he can help you out at home. But in the real world this is, of course, nonsense. In our lifetime at least, working mothers, unlike working fathers, are going to continue to have two jobs and two areas of responsibility.

"It's going to get worse," well-meaning mothers I meet on airplanes, in grocery stores and playgrounds tell me. "You've got it easy now. Your daughter's still a baby and you have full-time help. Wait 'til she's a teenager and she comes home to an empty house. Then you'll have your problems. You simply cannot raise an adolescent without one parent on full-time duty." If that is true, then what is the point of pushing women today into careers in medicine, law, and business? Who is going to be home to take care of the children?

Again, the threatening question: Can we be both good homemakers and mothers and succeed in a career?

I have given that question a great deal of thought since I finally acknowledged that the activities of my life were more than I or anyone else could handle. And my tentative answer is yes, it is possible. But there are limits.

I can have a nice, comfortable home. But in order to keep both career and family intact it has to be in the city. And it must be small and manageable. The suburban house and its commute had to go. We had to put it on the market. (All those linens I'd accumulated! The dining-room set! The piano! Christine's playroom!)

\*Child care is not tax deductible. The IRS allows a tax credit of a maximum of \$400 for one child, \$800 for two or more.

The calamity of our venture into suburbia did, for me, make the bubble burst. But the underlying question of how to balance a family and a profession remained. We *did* choose to bring Christine into the world. She is the joy of our life. We wanted to—and felt obligated to—do our best to make her a happy, intelligent, sociable child. At bottom, then, my child, not my career, was my highest priority. And having reaffirmed that, the solution to the juggling act was clear. First, I would find people to help me with the cleaning, shopping, and errands, even if that meant that all of my income was consumed by expenses of the household budget. Second, I would cut back on professional activities to make certain there was lots of room for Christine in my life. The second decision was one based on a premise that would not sit well with feminists: As a career woman with a family, my aspirations and achievements had to be somewhat less than a career man with a family—or a career couple without children.

**W**hy was my professional life to be diminished—rather than Steve's, or *both* our careers? My work, a smorgasbord of activities, had more flexibility than his. If he was to continue to be a partner at a law firm, he had to put in a 10-hour day. Indeed, it is probably accurate to say that most professional men today do not have the sort of job freedom to allow more participation in parenthood. Maybe 50 years from now things will be different. But like other working mothers, I have to survive within the system as it exists. How would I cut back if I, too, were a partner at a law firm or an officer at a major corporation? The only answer is that as a mother I simply could not stay in such a job. I am now convinced that the only way parenthood and joint careers can be successfully mingled is if at least one parent, usually the wife, chooses a career with substantial flexibility—one where she is her own boss or has strictly defined and limited hours.

I could still work at my job full time. But I would leave at 5 P.M., not 7. I could travel, but not more than a day or two a month. The two-day seminar in Denver was okay, but the international symposium in Japan was out. I could continue to write books—but one next year, not three. I could do cable-television spots, but would have to turn down the radio station's offer to do a weekly interview show. I could work for a job and for a cause, but not to the extent that there was no time and energy left to meet my family responsibilities and to enjoy the company of my husband and child.

The day I faced the necessity for modifying and re-aligning those life goals made long-ago was a most difficult one for me because, in essence, I had discovered my limits. But it was also the day I stopped marching to the beat of a series of other people's drums, and began confidently following the beat of my own. I hope. ■