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Support for parents and families: A
retrospective look at family life articles in
Broome County Living magazine 1986 – 1988

Local and Regional Projects

7-13-1988

Women at home – how they cope

V. Sue Atkinson

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July/August 1988
Broome County

Living



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Those
Terrific
Two-Year-Olds

•
Garden Walks
Scheduled

•
School Age
Child Care

Living

Vol. 14 July/Aug. No. 4

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Cover photo:
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Enrollment Fee:
\$5/1 year; \$12/3 years

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Information Center Tip

It's gardening time and our Information Center is ready to help.

You can bring your soil in to be tested for \$2. Also, we have free fact sheets, such as "Managing Your Home Vegetable Garden," and others that give information on growing raspberries, strawberries, and blue-

berries. If your lawn needs help, call for a free fact sheet, "Basic Lawn Care," and a new publication from Cornell, "Livable Landscape Design," which costs \$9.50.

Whatever your needs, we are here to help. Give us a call at 772-8953 or stop by and visit.

Cover: Kim Aiello and her terrific not-quite-two-year-old

daughter, Erin, are involved in our family well-being programs.

Women at Home - How They Cope

V. Sue Atkinson
Home Economics
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Statistics on women and work indicate fewer mothers are staying at home with children, even very small children. Not only is the percentage of mothers of small children in the work force increasing, but mothers are returning to work earlier following the birth of a baby.

Short or non-existent maternity leaves and the desire or necessity to keep a job often result in women's time at home

with young children being measured in weeks rather than months or years. Between the statistics and the media barrage about employed "supermoms," you might wonder who's left at home? Is every mother's life a case study in changing roles?

Probably every family has been touched by the social and economic forces that have encouraged or forced men's and women's roles to undergo change. Still, we continue to hear voices that question the trend toward maternal employment. One thing we hear is that there are more mothers at home than we might think. U.S. Department of Labor statistics on working mothers include part-time employees,

women who work less than year round, women who operate home-based businesses, freelance writers, and unpaid workers in family businesses -many of whom may consider themselves fulltime mothers. At least a few of these women are spending some of their time at home writing books which document their own and others' experiences as at-home mothers.

Some common themes of these books include a realization that working motherhood can be more difficult than fulfilling. "It . . . did not occur to me that when a woman 'has it all,' she has to handle it all . . . There are many cures for boredom, but few for the harried life of a working mother," writes former college instructor Christine Davidson in Staying Home Instead: How to Quit the Working-Mom Rat Race and Survive Financially.

Mary, a Binghamton woman who works fulltime and has a two-year-old child, told me, "If we have another child, I would do things differently. I wouldn't go back to work fulltime with a three-month-old baby and go through the whole child-care thing again. I finally looked at my life and said, 'I don't have to do this.' Why would anyone do this who didn't have to?"

The financial status of at-home mothers is a frequent concern, and several books deal with this subject. In addition to



Davidson's book, Mary Ann Cahill's The Heart Has Its Own Reasons gives practical ideas to make staying home financially feasible.

Being able to afford to stay home versus having to work is a difficult issue for some. One Broome County mother who does not work outside the home told me, "I know that a lot of women really have to work because they're single parents or their husbands are students or unemployed, but I get tired of people telling me they have to work when I know their husband makes more money than mine, or that their paycheck is going for a new car or payments on their boat. I know that sounds awful, but I work hard to manage financially to be able to stay home."

Dolores, a mother of two preschoolers, related how she and her husband deliberately bought a house that they could afford with one income so that she would not be forced back to work in order to keep a roof

over their heads. She explained her philosophy: "I worked for ten years, and I really enjoyed it. Now I'm not working for about ten years. I don't feel like I'm missing anything. I'll have many more years to work in my life." This approach, termed "sequencing" in a book of that title by Arlene Cardozo, suggests that women, at least married professionals, view their careers in three stages: fulltime career, fulltime mother, and incorporation of career and family. In other words, you can have it all, but not at the same time.

In What's a Smart Woman Like You Doing at Home?, authors Linda Burton, Janet Dittmer, and Cheri Loveless recount their own and others' experiences in deciding to be at-home mothers. Disillusionment with the "supermom" role, dissatisfaction with the idea of "quality time," ("It is not the thirty minutes of intensive playtime or lesson time with Mommy that is going to shape

our children's lives, so much as the day-in and day-out view from the front of the grocery cart"); difficulty juggling job and children; and a newfound attraction for home and mothering led to the authors' decisions to put careers aside, at least for the time being. Decisions made before children were born, sometimes based on glamorized media images of working mothers, just didn't stand up. Burton writes, "Too many of us are feeling much like the miller's daughter in the fairy tale, 'Rumpelstiltskin.' Giving up our children in order to live up to the promise that we could spin straw into gold sounded fine before our sons and daughters were born."

Is this merely a conservative backlash - the last breaths of a dying lifestyle? I don't think so. The type of fulltime motherhood being advocated differs from that of the 1950s. Mothering young children is seen as a special, relatively short phase

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Disagreements (cont'd)

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are important to you. Try the following the next time you are involved in a disagreement:

1. Be sure of your facts, where facts are involved.
2. Choose a time, free of interruptions, to discuss the basis of your differences, but first wait until you've cooled down.
3. Focus on learning how the other person developed his or her viewpoint. What people, events, or reading were influential?
4. Give the other person your full attention. Listen without interrupting because this shows you want to un-

derstand, not just criticize or jump in with your own opinion.

5. Restate what you understood the other to say, to be sure you heard correctly. For example: "Marge, did you say you totally disagree with my decision to marry Dan?"
6. Explain your viewpoint and the reasons behind it. Be as specific as possible. For example: "It seems to me that you should see a doctor. I really want to see you begin to feel better and I can't see that there has been much change since last week."

7. Try to be honest so that others will know where you stand and be willing to listen to you.

Whatever you do, assure the other that your goal is to understand his or her point of view, not to convince this person to agree with you. If earlier words were said in anger, there could have been some exaggeration, so don't be surprised if a thoughtful discussion lessens the differences between you. If it doesn't, a good airing of the subject will help you understand each other better. That's always a good feeling.

food or liquid and the top of the jar. If the jars are too full, some of the contents may bubble out during heat processing and affect the seal on the jar. Too much space requires a longer processing time.

It is not necessary to add salt when canning. One advantage of home preservation is that YOU control what is added to the vegetables. Pickling is the only preservation method that requires that salt be added.

FACT SHEET AVAILABLE

For step-by-step instructions on how to heat process in either a water-bath or pressure canner, please refer to our fact sheet, "Canning Fruits, Tomatoes and Vegetables," available in our Information Center at 840 Front Street.

FREEZING

Freezing is one of the easiest methods of food preservation. As a general rule, vegetables that are usually cooked before eating freeze well. Vegetables eaten raw for their firmness and crispness tend to lose these qualities when frozen.

Enzymes help speed the ripening and maturing process,

and are found naturally in fresh vegetables. Before freezing vegetables, it is necessary to inactivate these enzymes so that undesirable changes do not occur in the vegetables during freezer storage. Immersing vegetables briefly in boiling water (blanching) is a way to do this. Over-blanching results in a cooked product and a loss of flavor, color, and nutrients. Under-blanching speeds up enzyme activity and is worse than no blanching at all. For directions and timetables for blanching, please refer to "Freezing Vegetables," another fact sheet available from our Information Center.

DRY PACK METHOD

The dry pack method of freezing is recommended for all vegetables. It results in a good quality product, and preparation for freezing is easier. After the vegetables have been blanched, cooled and drained, package them quickly in either rigid freezer containers (plastic or waxed cardboard) or in freezer bags. Remove as much air as possible from the bags, but leave a 1/2-inch space in the rigid containers. Be sure to seal tightly and label with the name of the vegetable and the packaging date before freezing.

For best results, freeze the vegetables as quickly as possible. Do not overload your freezer with unfrozen food. Add only the amount that will freeze in 24 hours. For highest quality and nutritive value, use home-frozen foods within 8-12 months (freezer burn may occur if they are stored too long.) Although it is not harmful, freezer burn does affect flavor and toughens food.

USE YOUR KNOW-HOW

With this basic knowledge of how to buy, store, and preserve fresh vegetables, you will be able to enjoy them to their fullest! For more detailed information, please call our Consumer Response Line, Monday - Friday, 10 am - 1 pm. Our Consumer Consultants are ready to help you with your questions during this harvest season.

RESOURCES:

"Vegetable Selection and Care," United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, Alexandria, VA.

Tenney, M.L., "Canning Fruits, Tomatoes and Vegetables," Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, May, 1987.

Women (cont'd)

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in a woman's life, a time to do important work that will shape the child's future. Motherhood is not seen as a woman's only aspiration, but one that deserves priority for a period of her life when she puts her young children's needs first, for the ultimate benefit of all. And mothers at home do not conform to any particular ideological

stereotype. "In fact there are women at home who are officers in the National Organization for Women, neoliberals, neoconservatives, moderates, trade unionists, anarchists. They are left-wing, right-wing, 'pro-life,' 'pro-choice,' anti-ERA, Pro-ERA," writes Davidson.

I look forward to a time when mothers at home will feel valued rather than pressured to make other choices; when employed mothers will be characterized as neither neglectful nor "with-it;" and when we can all agree that there is more than one right way to bring up children.