

# Club Mom

**THEY QUIT HIGH-POWERED JOBS TO STAY HOME WITH THE KIDS. WHAT CAME NEXT WAS REVEALING, REWARDING, AND EXHAUSTING—ALTOGETHER, NOT A DAY AT THE BEACH.**

BY BARBARA MATUSOW

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BARBARA RIES

DIANE BOYD Rauber is scurrying around, filling bottles with apple juice and getting her three-year-olds, John and David, bundled up to leave the house. They are on their way to the Wednesday Morning Group, a support group with weekly speakers for stay-at-home moms, and she doesn't want to be late. But John is balking. "I don't want to wear my boots," he says.

"I want you to wear them," she says evenly. "It's slippery out today."

He won't put on his jacket, either, the way he learned in nursery school, so Rauber does it for him. "You feeling a little out of sorts today, buddy?" she asks, carrying him out to the car.

John's twin, David, dons his jacket himself and walks out to the Dodge minivan under his own steam. Both boys hop into their car seats and wait for Mom to buckle them up.

The weekly drill is a lot easier than it used to be. When the children were infants, Rauber would strap them into their seats and drive them around and around the neighborhood, steering with one hand and eating breakfast from McDonald's with the other. The goal was to get them to sleep for an hour so they would be less cranky when

she left them at the nursery. "It was a huge ordeal, but I was really determined that I wasn't going to let having two kids keep me penned in the house," she says.

In her previous life, Rauber, who is 36 and expecting her third child in May, was a lawyer at a small DC law firm. She still does some work for an attorney, mostly out of her house, one day a week, and she volunteers as an juvenile advocate with the Montgomery County court system. But her own children now take precedence over work.

It's the same for the hundred other women in the Wednesday Morning Group, whose members had careers as economists, nurses, landscape designers, sales managers, and research chemists. Most, like Rauber, are in their thirties, have young children, work part-time (though on a very limited basis), and are active in community activities. And according to a survey of the group by *The Washingtonian*, nearly all plan to resume their careers, probably when their eldest child is in school. Then, they say, they hope to find jobs with flexible hours, even if it means earning less money.

These women are not trophy moms, whose decision to stay home has been become a status symbol in some circles. Although group members are nearly all married to professionals and would be considered privileged by most Americans—family income in most, but not all, cases exceeds \$100,000—they are finding it a

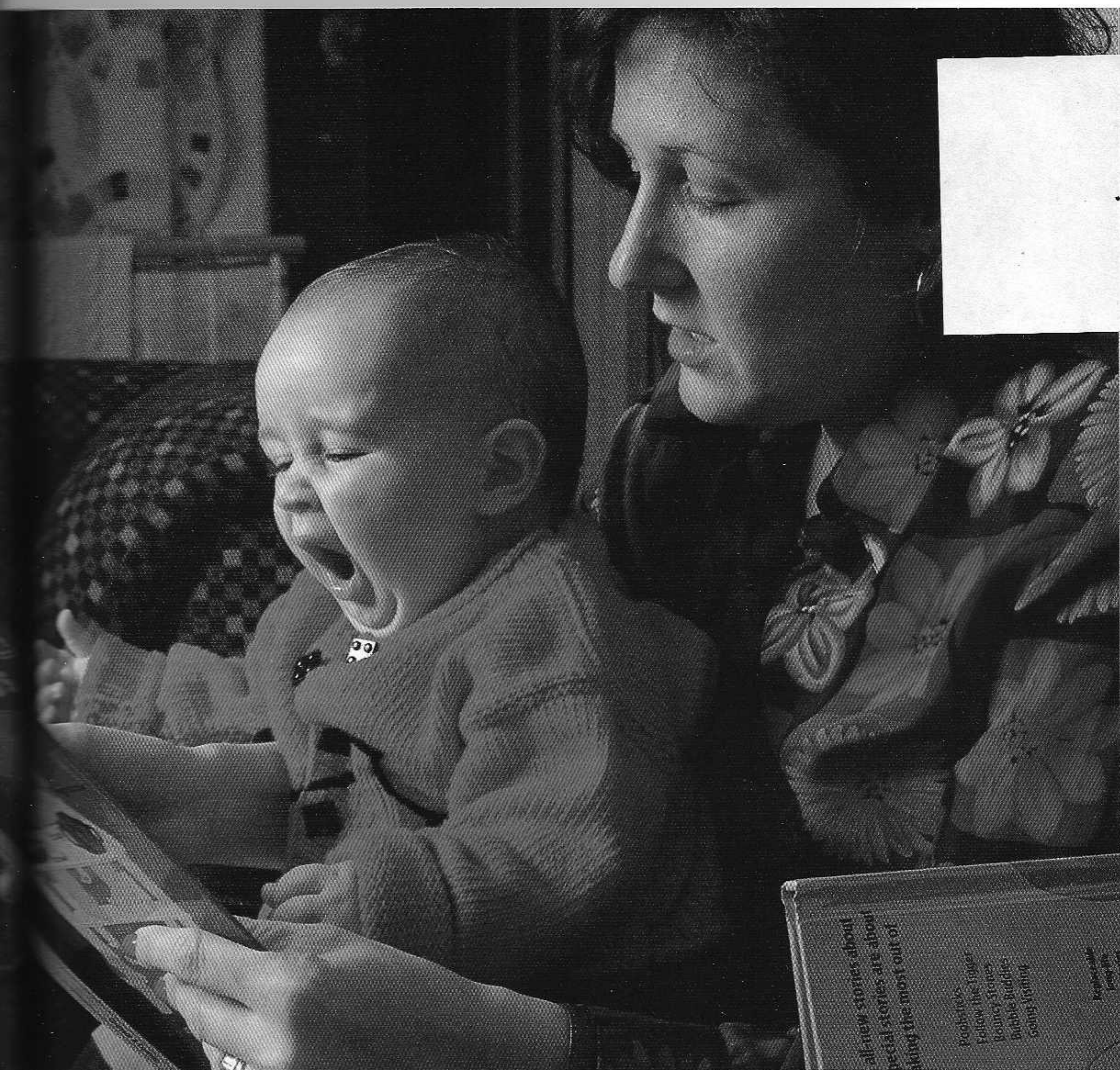
challenge to get by on one salary. Psychologically, they battle isolation and a feeling that others do not value what they do.

One reason is that they are swimming against the current. Seventy percent of mothers with college degrees go back to work before their babies are a year old, a percentage that is steadily increasing. "The trend you used to see where women in the labor force would drop out to have kids and come back later has almost disappeared," says Daphne Spain, a demographer at the University of Virginia. "Women's work patterns now look like men's—even more so for educated women."

Those women who do choose to stay at

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home are finding the way a little easier, thanks to classes for new mothers, online bulletin boards, newsletters, and support groups. Four years ago, for example, there were only two MOMS (Moms Offering Moms Support) clubs in the area. Today there are more than 20.

Still, for professional women, many of whom never expected to be interrupting their careers to raise children, staying home can be disorienting. Recently, seven members of the Wednesday Morning Group gathered over coffee and cake to talk about their lives and the pros and cons of staying home with their kids—what they've lost, and what they've gained.

### **"BEING A NEW MOTHER CAN BE VERY LONELY"**

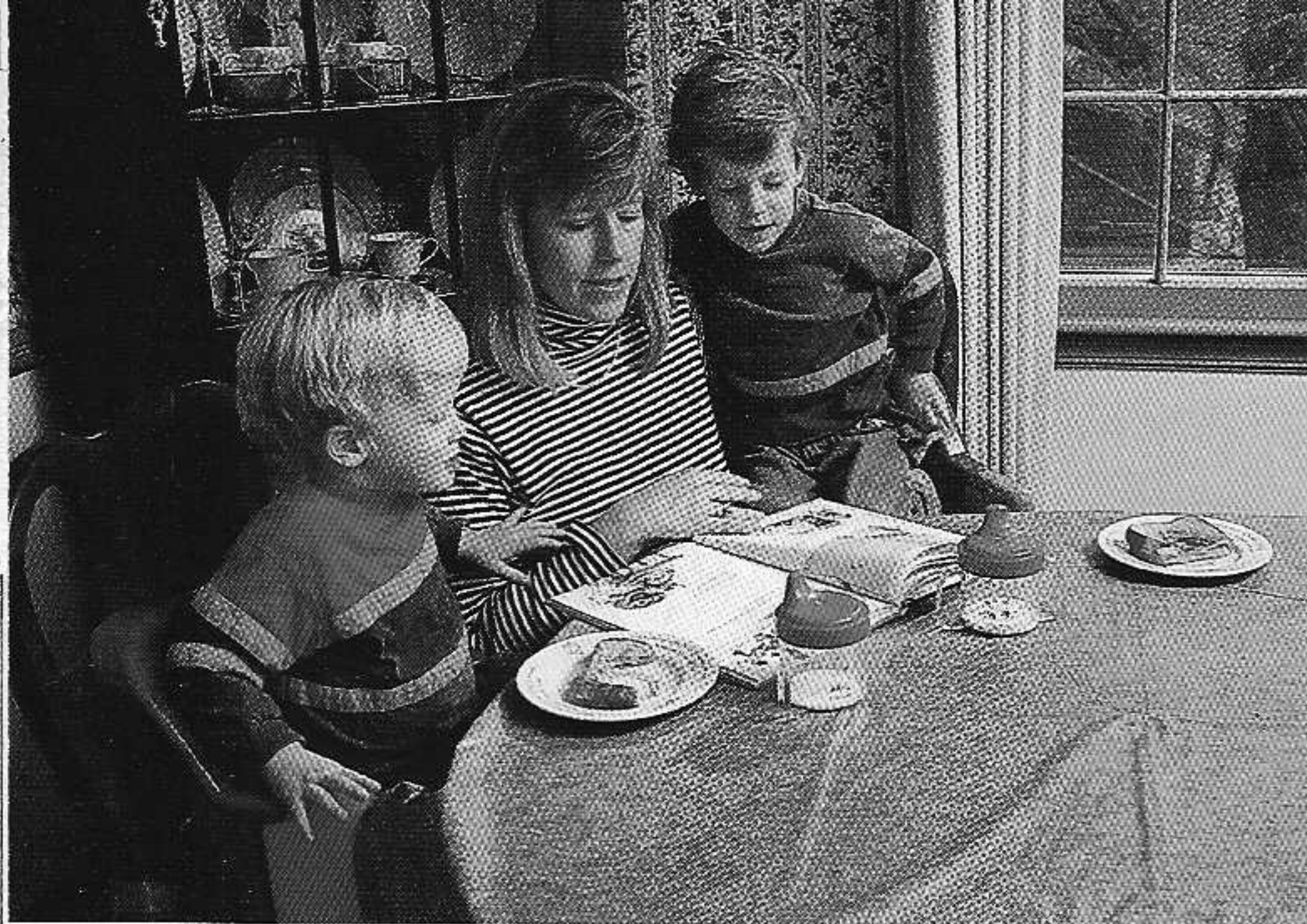
*Pam Sherman, 34, stopped practicing law four years ago to become a full-time actress. She quit work a year ago when Zachary was born but recently took on a four-month acting stint at the Kennedy Center. Her husband, Neal, runs his own marketing and sales company.*

**M**Y MOTHER WAS SO THRILLED THAT I was going to stay at home and be with Zachary. Neal and I had been married for 12 years, and I don't think she ever thought I was going to have a baby. Yet when I got the part in *Shear Madness*, she

### **Pam Sherman heard mixed messages from family about staying home with Zachary.**

was really glad. She said, "You know, you needed more stimulation than lying around with Zachary like you do all day." That made me so angry. If I was lying around with him, it would be a good thing. But I'm busy with him the whole time. I cook. I roast things now. I never did that before. I'm keeping a house. I don't view that as lying around. So, while my mother was supportive, I was getting these mixed messages.

Being a new mother can be very lonely. At five weeks I was going crazy, so I hit the malls. I was actually excited just to be sit-



**After having twins, Diane Boyd Rauber says, "I felt totally different about things."**

ting at Gloria Jean's drinking coffee. The ladies' room at Nordstrom is a great place for meeting people when you're breast-feeding. They have a nursing room, and I was doing 15 minutes on each side. Inevitably one or two other moms would come in while I was there, and I would get advice from the ones with older children. I didn't make any lasting friendships, but it was a wonderful way to connect with other people, because it can be so isolating to be at home.

My son has just learned how to kiss. That is, he thinks he's learned, and he gives these big sloppy kisses. And your body aches for the joy of how wonderful it is. It's like a guilty pleasure—a secret we keep from these women who work full-time, that our children are just a joy. My husband loves being with him as much as I do. He usually comes home from work at 6:30, and he complains because I put Zachary to bed at 7:30, which only leaves him an hour. He calls me Rain Mom—like Dustin Hoffman in *Rain Man*, who was always saying, "Five o'clock. Gotta watch Wapner." Neal gives me a hard time for being so rigid about Zach's schedule.

I think Neal and I are much closer now than we were before we had Zach. Before, we were both very focused on our careers. Now we concentrate more on our home, and we talk so much more than we used to. Of course, I only have one child at this point, not two, which makes a big difference.

He has always been very supportive of anything I decided to do, but I must say I feel like I get mixed messages from my friends who work. Basically, what I hear them saying is "Isn't it great that you're at home, but you're not using your brain.

You're an intelligent person, but what is intelligent about being a homemaker?"

A lot of the women who work tell me, "If I could, I would stay at home." They don't think about the financial sacrifices those of us who stay at home are making or the step back we are taking in our careers. Or that it's emotionally draining to be at home with a child all day long. I know the sacrifices they're making. I don't think they are empathetic to the sacrifices I'm making.

**"I FEEL THE NEED FOR A BREAK FROM DIAPERS"**

*Diane Boyd Rauber has twins John and David. She and husband John, an attorney, are expecting their third child in May.*

I ALWAYS THOUGHT I WOULD KEEP WORKING. I was fortunate enough to be at a small, family-oriented law firm, and after I got pregnant I made arrangements to go back three days a week. Then I had the twins. At that point, like a lot of women, I started feeling totally different about things. First, having twins made finding childcare a lot more complicated. But I realized that deep down I really didn't want to relinquish my children to someone else.

It was hard for me to admit it. Women like me have gone through so much education and training, it's hard to say, "Yeah, I'm going to walk away from it for a while and take my chances that when I come back I'll be able to get a good job." I guess I still worry about that, which is why I started working again after the twins were 15 months old, albeit on a very part-time basis. I felt the need for a break from diapers once in a while, but it's also important to me to feel I'm still in touch with the work world.

I do volunteer work as well. I'm a court-appointed special advocate in Montgomery County, which means I get teamed up with children who are abused or neglected, and I make recommendations to the court. I was a special educator before I went to law school, and doing this is a way of making a difference in the community. It's also a way to meet people and make contacts, which may help me down the road when I want to go back to work.

The responsibility you feel taking care of children can be overwhelming, especially at the beginning. One thing that has helped a lot is that my husband has switched jobs. He used to work at a large law firm and put in very long hours, but now he works for a company and usually gets home by 6:30. He gives the boys their bath every night. I help, but when he walks in the door, I'm ready to say, "They are your responsibility now."

Psychologically one of the hardest things is that John is the one making all of our income now. I didn't get married until I was 30, and it's really difficult for women in their thirties to have to ask for money. One reason I took a part-time job was to have my own stash so that if I wanted to go out at Christmas and buy him a present, I wouldn't have to say, "Gee, honey, I'm going to take the joint account and buy you a present."

I've often thought that once my kids were in second or third grade I would be ready to go back to work full-time, but I see how important it is to be home with older kids too. So now I'm not so sure.

**"I ADMIT I'VE HAD SOME IDENTITY PROBLEMS"**

*Joan Wolf, 36, was a managing broker at Shannon & Luchs (now Weichert Realtors). She is the mother of a four-year-old, Leah, and still handles a few real-estate transactions a year. Her husband, Steven Chiaverini, is a health-care consultant.*

WHEN I WAS WORKING, MY INTENTION was to continue. My agents even joked about how we would put a bassinet in my office. At the time, I had no clue of what a brain shift it is to have a child. Then in my third month I had some light bleeding. And I said, "I'll be damned if a job interferes with my having this baby," so I took a leave.

I admit I've had some identity problems since I've been at home. It's important to think of myself as a businesswoman, which is why I still do a few deals a year. The drop in income is another thing I've had to face up to. We have reengineered financially at least two or three times. The first time, Steven

wrote up a list and said, "When you're ready to look at this list, let me know, because there are some ideas of where we could save money." The list contained major and minor things, from turning off the light when you're not in the living room to not eating out as much, which we did all the time.

At first I reacted badly. My tendency was to close my eyes, cover my ears, and sing la, la, la. But after a few days I looked at the list again and realized that the adjustments were not all that severe. It was the simple fact that adjustments had to be made at all.

When I was asked to contribute a recipe to the Wednesday Morning newsletter a couple of years ago, I gave the address of my favorite takeout place. Now I consider cooking part of my job description.

I've come a long way in the kitchen, which has helped financially. Another example: I fought our tax assessment and saved us \$1,200. I probably wouldn't have bothered with it before. When I needed new curtains, I found some fabric for 50 cents a yard.

We had a woman come to the Wednesday Morning Group to talk about saving for your child's education. The stress level was so high that day that every bit of coffee cake was eaten. She said we needed to be putting away approximately \$450 a month for each child, and most people's jaws dropped to the floor. I'm sure very few of us are putting aside that much money. For most of us, it's just la, la, la.

I find I'm much more interested in local issues these days. I don't pay much atten-

tion to big-picture politics because I feel that my voice isn't heard. That doesn't mean I don't know what's going on. In this town you are always going to focus on politics to some extent. But I mostly focus on things that affect me, like speed bumps and the public schools. I stay away from TV news. All those stories about children in peril—I find it so distressing. I can't go to sleep at night if I watch the news.

I still don't know when I'll go back to work full-time. I won't go back until it feels right. Being at home with my daughter is the ultimate in cause and effect. I have a daily hand in her activities, and I see the results instantaneously. At almost every moment I feel, God, I wouldn't do this any other way.

**Dorothy Weinstein finds time for herself at 6 AM, before daughter Kara wakes.**

### "I DISCOVERED AN IMMEDIATE SISTERHOOD"

*Dorothy Weinstein, 36, is the mother of three-year-old Kara. She once directed a large government-relations office; now she works one day a week as a health-policy analyst. Jay, her husband, recently started his own investment-advisory firm.*

I FIGURED I WOULD GO BACK TO WORK after my daughter was born. My boss and I even worked out an elaborate plan that would allow me to go back, including hiring an assistant for me. But the minute Kara was born, I knew I couldn't leave her. I wasn't worried about leaving her with someone else. I just wanted to be with her.

One of the things that makes it easier to be a stay-at-home mom these days is the number of resources out there. There is PACE, or Parent and Community Education, which many of us have gone to. The Jewish Community Center and most hospitals and churches have support groups. I discovered an immediate sisterhood out there. Pediatricians and other experts you might consult are fine, but the real knowledge you get is from other mothers, both practical knowledge and emotional support.

My husband is great, too. One thing that's helped a lot is the fact that he works for himself now. Tomorrow I have a doctor's appointment, and he'll stay home with Kara. A year ago I wouldn't have asked him to do that. I still don't like to ask

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**Caring for four-year-old Leah meant new skills, less money for Joan Wolf's family.**



## Club Mom

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him a lot, but now, if I really need him, he can go in late or come home a little early.

Even with only one kid, I feel like I'm always playing "Beat the Clock." I get up at six o'clock every morning and exercise. I have a treadmill, and I read while I'm on it. Usually I read a book, although I try to look at the Style section of the *Post*. Then I take my shower. My husband is always asking why I get up so early. The reason is it's my time. I need that time to be a good mom. I dread the moment, and it's coming, when my daughter won't need a nap anymore. I need that time to recharge my batteries.

I love being at home with my daughter. I don't think there's anything more delicious in the morning than to see your children in their pajamas with their hair all in their face, all toasty warm, needing you. The way they smell—it's a whole sensory thing. How do you express the joy of picking her up from preschool and experiencing how she loves to see you? No one loves to see me that much. There's just something so delectable about your own child that you can't even say it in words.

### "I'VE LEARNED HOW TO PINCH A PENNY"

*Lisa Engle, 30, was a CIA intelligence analyst. She has not worked since her children, Emily, three, and nine-month-old Hannah, were born. Her husband, Ken, is a systems analyst for Bell Atlantic.*

I'M A MARTHA STEWART WANNABE. I LOVE everything connected with the home—gardening, cooking, crafts, all of that. So when I got pregnant with Emily, I was really excited at the prospect of staying home.

But I got no support at all from my parents at first. My husband was not in favor either. I was a GS-12 at the time and was making half our family income. He was worried about what the loss of income would do to our retirement, our savings, all our plans.

The first year was really hard. I was nursing, trying to meet new friends, suffering from the usual new-mother blues. But any time I got upset, Ken's reaction was always "go back to work." What saved me was joining these support groups. When Emily was six weeks old, I joined a mother-baby support group at Holy Cross Hospital that met once a week. After that some of us formed a play group. I also joined the Wednesday Morning Group. That was my lifeline—people who also had had professional jobs and decided to stay at home.

What surprised me is how much hostility you encounter from working moms. I have one friend who works who says it's easier to work than to be at home. But she is the only one who has ever said that to me. From the rest, I've mostly felt animosity. One woman said she saw absolutely no benefit from mothers staying at home, that they just basically put their kids in front of the TV. But my husband has totally come around. At one point I was doing some training at the agency on a part-time basis, and he got wind of the whole daycare shuffle. He completely lost interest in me going back to work.

It's hard to explain how busy you stay all the time and why we sometimes wind up eating in the car. In the nice weather, we eat lunch in different parks, but when it's cold out, there isn't much choice. Hannah takes a nap in the morning, and by the time I get her up at 11, we have to be on our way. But Emily is hungry. I'm hungry. So I pack our lunches the night before while I'm cleaning up the dishes. I usually eat while I'm driving, but sometimes I have to stop and nurse Hannah.

Financially, I've learned how to pinch a penny a whole lot tighter. I look for the kids' clothes on the clearance racks six or nine months in advance, and I clip coupons like crazy. We try to go to the \$1.50 movies, and we do all our own home maintenance. You have to suppress all those "wants" you have. You have to figure out what's a want and what's a need. And you have to decide whether staying at home is what you really want to do. Because you're seeing everybody else inch up materially, and there you are, stuck in the same place.

Will I go back to work when the kids are older? At the moment I don't think so. When my kids are in school, I just hope I can let myself enjoy the gardening, the cooking, and the other stuff I like to do and not feel guilty or feel like I have to justify my existence.

### "PHYSICALLY, I'M ON THE GO A LOT MORE"

*Susan Potter, an attorney, worked part-time after her first child, Zachary, was born. She stopped working when Emily, now 20 months old, came along. Her husband, Jonathan, is also a lawyer.*

I HAD A GREAT PART-TIME ARRANGEMENT, working three days a week for a branch office of a law firm. But the office never took off, and I found out two weeks before my second child was due that it was closing. At that point, I was fully intending to go back to work. I liked working. But after a couple of months of being at home, I decided the satisfaction was just so much greater that I wanted to stay home.

Working was a lot easier. I could go out to lunch if I wanted to, go to the bathroom when I needed to. I got to sit down with adults and use my intellect. At night when I would come home, the house would be clean. The nanny did all the laundry. Not that I didn't have a lot of stresses at work. Our nanny took classes at night and couldn't stay late, and often enough six o'clock would come and I'd be stuck on a conference call, and what could I do? I couldn't say to the client, "Well, I have to go now because my nanny leaves at seven." That's just not acceptable. Or I'd be stuck in traffic on my way home, with the steam rising from my head.

Still, it was a different kind of stress. I didn't feel so tired at the end of each day, like I do now. Physically I'm on the go a lot more, carrying children around, lifting them in and out of car seats, carrying loads of laundry up and down the stairs, or lugging a baby in one arm and two bags of



**Lisa Engle, here with Emily and Hannah, depended on several new-mother support groups. "That was my lifeline," she says.**



groceries in the other. Sometimes when I'm lifting a double stroller into the car, I think, "Who needs aerobics?"

I'll be honest with you. Staying at home with small children is a lot of mindless drudgery. I had two in diapers for many months, and there was a long period when I felt like all I did the whole day long was change diapers. I do laundry every day. There were a lot of days last winter when we never left the house because the weather was bad or the kids were sick.

At the same time, I feel a lot less conflicted than I used to. When I was working three days a week, I always felt like I should be somewhere else. When I was home, I felt guilty for not being in the office. I always had an ear out for the telephone, and I was constantly checking the fax machine to see if I had a fax, even on my days off.

At work, I always felt guilty that I wasn't at home with my son. Now I feel like I can devote all my energies to this one thing. When the kids are sick, I don't have to worry about taking off from work or waiting until my day off. I can take them to the doctor. I like working in my son's classroom every couple of weeks. I feel there is no comparison between the satisfaction I got from pleasing my supervisor and clients and having a happy child.

I guess I sound sort of schizophrenic on the subject. Maybe it's because society itself seems schizophrenic on the subject. The same people who think society would be better off if more women stayed at home might not respect you intellectually or want to sit down and have a political discussion

with you. Or they are more interested in talking about what my husband does. It's hard for women like us, because most all of us have had pretty interesting careers. To be thought of as someone not worth having a conversation with is pretty demoralizing.

### "I HAD TO PROVE THAT I STILL HAD A BRAIN"

*Carrie Klein was a speechwriter and foreign-policy adviser to Senator Mark Hatfield. The mother of Max, two, and Isabel, 11 months, she was working on a master's degree in education when her first child was born. Her husband, Jason, is a lawyer. She now takes an occasional writing and editing job.*

**W**E MOVED BACK TO WASHINGTON when my son was five months old, and I hardly knew anybody

**Attorney Susan Potter says that life as a lawyer was easier than staying home with children Zachary and Emily.**

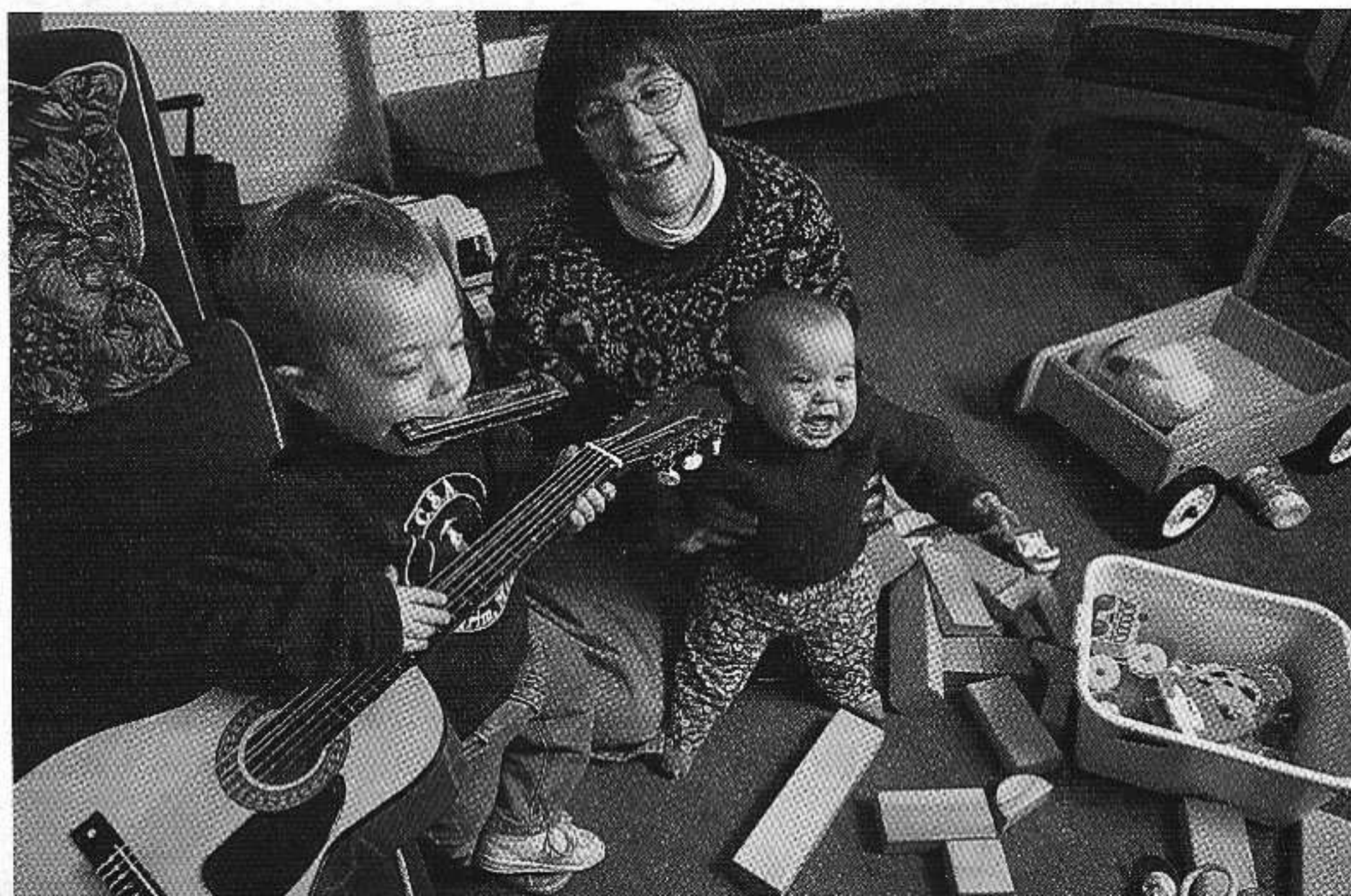
anymore. I still had some friends who lived on Capitol Hill, and they dutifully made the trip out to Rockville for dinner, but they might as well have been coming to another planet. They wanted to talk about markups and who said what on the Senate floor, while my greatest concern was finding a clean blouse that hadn't been puked on.

When Max was about six months old, I was invited to my first dinner party. It seemed like everyone there was a high-powered professional, and I found I kept dropping into the conversation, "Well, I heard on NPR . . ." or "I read in the *Economist*. . . ." I was sort of appalled at myself, but I was trying to make sure that everyone knew I still had a brain although I was at home with a baby.

About that time I was starting to think, "Gosh, maybe I should go back to work. This is too hard." Then, thank God, I met some stay-at-home mothers who had interesting lives. Because ultimately, what it comes down to is that staying home is very isolating. Work is a lot of things. It's good and it's bad, but one of the things it is is a community. That's what you don't have the day you come home with a baby. And you need it more than at any time before in your life.

It's still hard when you meet someone at a dinner party. You can see it in their eyes when you say, "I'm staying home with my children." Mentally, most people sort of go, "Oh. Uh-huh. Next." That includes working moms.

From what I can see, there is a hell of a tension between women who work full-time and those who stay at home. The reason, I think, is that there is so much ambivalence all the way around. The stay-at-homes think, "Ten years ago, I was on the fast track, and



**"Work is a community," says Carrie Klein, who needed compatriots when adapting to life with Max and Isabel.**

now I just know a lot about diapers." Meanwhile, women who are working feel a bit guilty for shuffling their kids off to daycare. It's the rare conversation I've had with a mother who is working full-time where we are both honest about the mixed feelings we have about what we're doing.

One thing that's hard is that you have so little time for yourself. I get up at 5:30 so I can read the paper. It's the one thing I refuse to let go of. Although the other day I realized that the first thing I grabbed for after I finished the front page was the food

section. And I thought, "God, my life has really changed." All sorts of things have fallen by the wayside, like books and exercise. Still, I feel like I've made the right decision. I fundamentally believe that to grow up to be a decent, honest, contributing member of a civil society, you need to start by feeling safe and secure—and that I'm the best person to make my children safe and secure. Plus, I get to decide what they do. My son is fascinated by construction sites. I can say, "Let's spend an hour watching the cranes." □

## Help for Stay-at-Home Moms

**Dani's Moms.** Older mothers with young children meet monthly for dinner at Northern Virginia restaurants. Purely social; no kids. For information, call Kathy Holstrom at 703-716-9797.

**Lawyers at Home Forum.** This 180-member group is sponsored by the Women's Bar Association of the District of Columbia. Holds monthly meetings on Thursday mornings in Cleveland Park. Childcare available. The Women's Bar also has a forum for working parents that meets on the third Wednesday of each month at noon in downtown DC. For information, call 202-785-1540.

**Moms Offering Moms Support (MOMS).** Maryland chapters include Columbia, Damascus, Ellicott City, east and west Frederick, Germantown, Great Seneca, Norbeck, North Potomac, Olney, Silver Spring. Virginia chapters: Manassas, Stafford. Moms and kids get together several times a week for activities ranging from play groups to local museum trips. Monthly MOMS nights out have included book groups and lectures on child-related topics. For information, call regional coordinator Beth Mendelson at 301-754-2529.

**Mothers First.** For mothers interrupting careers to raise children. Locations: Arlington, Ashburn, Centreville, Fairfax, Falls Church, Lake Ridge, Leesburg, Rockville, Springfield, Sterling. Meetings, to which mothers bring their children, are held twice a month. The group also sponsors mom-and-child field trips, an older-moms group, and evening lectures once a month at Tysons-Pimmit Regional Library in Falls Church. For information, call 703-827-5922.

**Mothers at Home.** A Vienna-based advocacy network for stay-at-home mothers. Maintains information on support groups, public-policy issues, and

related subjects; the group's Web address is [www.mah.org](http://www.mah.org). \$18 a year. For a sample issue of the monthly *Welcome Home* magazine and a brochure, call 800-783-4666.

**Parent and Community Education (PACE).** Support and parenting course for new parents with infants up to six months old. Eight two-hour workshops look at such topics as feeding and sleeping patterns, normal development in the first year, mothering styles, and changing marital relationships. New groups, limited to ten mothers or fathers and their babies, form throughout the year in Northern Virginia, DC, and Montgomery County. \$110 for eight meetings. For information, call 301-983-9133.

**Wednesday Morning Group.** Meets from 10 to 11 AM each Wednesday in Kensington to hear speakers on topics ranging from the care of aging parents to the inner workings of the *Washington Post*. Professional co-op nursery available. For information, call Joan Wolf at 301-365-8860.

### ONLINE RESOURCES

**The CyberMom Dot Com** ([www.thecybermom.com](http://www.thecybermom.com)). Billed as an Internet home for moms with modems, this site is arranged like a house. Click on the kitchen for recipes; the powder room offers beauty tips. There's also a room for mom-to-mom chats.

**The Mommy Times** ([www.mommy-times.com](http://www.mommy-times.com)). This Web magazine is "dedicated to preserving the sanity of moms everywhere." Share stories, check out products and services, and read financial tips.

**Parents at Home** ([www.iquest.com/~jsm/moms/parenting.html](http://www.iquest.com/~jsm/moms/parenting.html)). Dozens of links to everything from tips on encouraging children's reading to reviews of kid-friendly (and not-so-friendly) movies.