

To work or not to work: Every mother's question

By NC News Service

When Pamela Bradley invited a six-year-old neighbor girl to join her children for lunch, she was taken aback by the child's blunt question. "Why are you here?" the youngster asked. "Why aren't you at work?"

"Because her own mother worked outside the home," Mrs. Bradley said, "she looked at me in disbelief and couldn't understand why I was home at lunchtime with my children."

Since that incident six years ago, some adults have put the same question to her, although with a bit more delicacy.

"I went through a period of embarrassment," she said, "when people would ask me when was I going to put my law degree to use. They felt that I should be earning dollars, which seems to be society's standard for measuring someone's worth. I used to bristle at such questions, but now I feel more secure in being at home."

Thirty years ago, Mrs. Bradley's decision to be a full-time mother would hardly have caused a ripple. At that time, two of every three mothers stayed home and concentrated solely on the job of raising a family. Today, however, for a variety of reasons, more than 60 percent of married women with children have entered the paid work force, at least on a part-time basis.

Which is the right course? It depends on who you talk to. Some mothers believe that staying home is essential to their children's upbringing. Others feel that their own mental stability depends on involvement outside the home, and that their influence on their children is over-rated. Still others, saddled with mortgage or rent payments four or five times higher than their own parents, believe that inflated living costs have made the two-income family a necessity.

Pam Bradley makes a good case for the non-working mother.

She and her husband Gerard met while they were law students at Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. They married in August 1981 while she was still in college. She was eight months pregnant when she took the bar examination and was admitted to law practice in New York state.

The Bradleys moved to Champaign, Ill., where they now live, in 1983, and he joined the faculty of the University



NC photo by Vern La Mare

Some mothers stay at home full time with young children while others work outside in full-time or part-time jobs.

of Illinois, where he is an associate professor.

In addition to the daughter born right after Mrs. Bradley passed the bar examination — Jennifer — they have one son, Kevin, born in December 1984, and another son, Daniel, born in May 1986.

"Our family is not finished, I hope," Mrs. Bradley said. Meanwhile, she plans to stay at home and care for the children.

It's not that the Bradleys couldn't use the extra money. Though his salary is substantial, the family has mortgage payments, a \$400 monthly repayment bill for college loans, and, this year, an \$890 kindergarten tuition for their daughter. They drive a 1971 compact car given to them by his parents, and he often rides to work on a bicycle.

Mrs. Bradley believes that society "is losing perspective" and places a high priority on "all the things that money can buy." She feels strongly that she is needed at home, full-time.

"I see how much children need their parents. We are our children's first teachers. We teach them right and wrong, and we interact with them. I don't want to turn them over to someone else. I want to be there for them."

On the other hand, Barbara Augenstein of Wauwatosa, Wis., has pursued a dual career for more than 25 years, and believes she has been suc-

cessful both as a business woman and a mother.

While operating her own court reporting business, Mrs. Augenstein has been able to help pay for the college education of her six children. Moreover, her wage earning power also made it possible for her husband, John (Jack) Augenstein, to make a career change.

In the fourth year of her marriage, Mrs. Augenstein went to a business col-

lege and learned to operate a stenotype machine.

"I was bored sitting at home, and wanted an intellectual challenge," she said.

"The kids pitched in and everyone had their own chores. At times, they grumbled a little, especially if it was their turn to make dinner. But it was a fact of life that I wasn't there all the time. Even so, court reporting assignments are only a few hours at a time, so that made it easier."

Her desire to enter the business world received her husband's support.

"I thought it was great," he said. It gives her an opportunity to be a person — an individual, to expand the range of her talents, and contributes to her own mental health. It certainly has been most helpful."

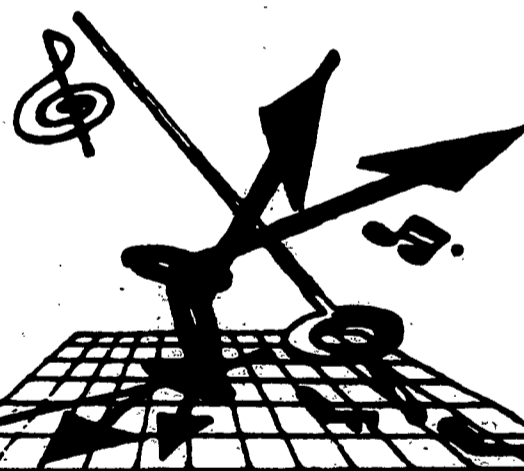
Mrs. Augenstein's dual career has also been beneficial to her husband. In 1985, he resigned as superintendent of Youngstown (Ohio) diocesan schools, and returned to Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, full time to earn a doctor's degree in education, while the family relied on Mrs. Augenstein's income.

Now Augenstein is embarked on a new career in college teaching as an assistant professor in the graduate school of Marquette University's College of Education.

"Without Barbara's help, I couldn't have made this career change," he said.

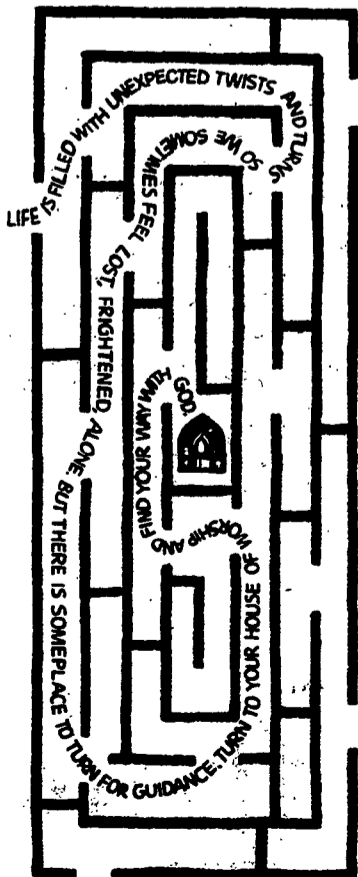
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