

## Articles

### "Double Duty: Motherhood and Lawyerhood"

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Let me start by saying that I love being a mom. It's been as personally rewarding as my career has been professionally rewarding. More so, even.

And I'm sure that all you moms reading this will agree wholeheartedly. Being somebody's mommy is wonderful, and none of us would trade it for all the money or chocolate in the world.

We all also can agree that, emotionally rewarding though motherhood may be, it brings its own set of challenges that hundreds and hundreds of years of social revolution have done little to remedy. A woman without a child, given the proper schooling and acculturation, can take on just about any man, whether it's professionally, intellectually or, in many cases, physically.

But add a child to your life and it all gets more complicated. Long hours at the office are more wrenching to give. Squeezing in a couple of workouts a week at the gym means losing precious time with your wee one. Heck, even reading for leisure takes a back seat to life's more pressing needs, like laundry and reading to your son.

I always knew these things intuitively. But a couple of recent events have crystallized my thoughts.

One is the impending birth of twins to Massachusetts Gov. Jane Swift. She's the same politician who was pregnant when she ran for lieutenant governor a couple of years ago, causing all sorts of nattering among the "a women's place is in the home" contingent.

Now that she's governor and expecting twins, the furor has been raised anew. How on earth, they ask, is she going to be a mother to twins and be a governor?

Did anybody ask, "How on earth can John F. Kennedy be a brand new father and our president?" Of course not.

Swift has a stay-at-home spouse, just like JFK did. So why the big fuss?

It's probably because, the rare exception aside, women are the primary caregivers for all the little human beings born every year. That's true whether mom works 40, 60 or zero hours a week outside the home. Additionally, women also are the homemakers, doing most of the grocery shopping, housekeeping and laundry.

The sexual revolution and the growing parity in salaries have done little to change that.

#### **Some Solutions**

Again, these are all facts I already knew at some level. But a new book by former New York Times reporter Ann Crittenden spells them all out in maddening detail. Crittenden's book "The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World is Still the Least Valued" is enough to make the blood in every mommy in the room boil.

Crittenden convincingly argues that motherhood, in all of itself, puts women behind the eight ball.

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The primary victim is a mother who leaves the paid workforce to stay at home with her children. Homemakers, the biggest single occupation in the United States, are the most likely group to face poverty in old age, she writes. Not only are they at the mercy of their spouses' incomes, but they also don't get any Social Security credit for their years at home, raising tomorrow's taxpayers.

But women who stay in the paid workforce also pay the price. Crittenden cites a 1991 study showing that 30-year-old American women without children were earning 90 percent of men's wages. But comparable women with children were making only 70 percent, even when all other factors were equal. Another survey of 200 female MBAs found that those who had pulled out of the job market for an average of nearly nine months earned 17 percent less than those who had never had an employment gap.

Crittenden makes a compelling argument that having children is the worst economic decision a woman can make.

While Crittenden proposes some solutions that would require massive societal and governmental buy-in of her position (not likely, regardless of who's in the White House), there are some steps that professional women can take to maximize their options.

In the legal profession, the one proposed "solution" I hear more than any other is for firms to offer flex-time and part-time work options. While I'd like to say that that's the panacea, I know better. The truth is that the large-firm economic model cannot easily accommodate alternative work options. That doesn't mean it's impossible to make part-time work; it just means that the odds are against it.

The single best way to ensure your professional viability as a lawyer is to—and I know I sound like a broken record sometimes when I say this—master your craft. When you're a fresh-faced associate, ruthlessly exploit every assignment for its learning potential. Watch how the pros do it and follow suit. When you decide to take the parental plunge, you'll be in a better position than your mediocre colleague who coasted on her charm to wrangle an alternative work arrangement. Being a lawyer is hard work, and adding motherhood on top of it makes it even harder.

Tangible solutions to the mommy conundrum aside, I think the one thing most mothers—those who work in the paid workforce and those who labor anonymously and unrecompensed at home—want is recognition.

Crittenden says it best: "What is needed is across-the-board recognition—in the workplace, in the family, in the law, and in social policy—that someone has to do the necessary work of raising children and sustaining families, and that the reward for such vital work should not be professional marginalization, a loss of status, and an increased risk of poverty."

After all, what would this country be without mothers? We not only give birth to the world's taxpayers, but we do our best to turn them into decent citizens that will do us proud. There's a lot of lip service out there about how mothering is the most important occupation in the world, but our society doesn't do anything to back that up.

And very few working mommies get "credit" for staying late at the office, even though we all know good and well that they've got another job waiting for them at home.

If we can't find some way to make good on our national debt to our moms, then the least we can do is thank them once in a while.