

# This babysitter's kids are too busy to sit

By JEANNE WHITTAKER

Anyone who has ever parented knows moments when it is easier to spell "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious" than locate a dependable baby sitter. Somehow, just when you hear of the perfect sitter, she always seems to have too many children, is retired, or is as mythical as Mary Poppins.

Jeanne Wassell, of Birmingham, is trying to do something about the problem. A single parent herself, she knows the problems that parents face when trying to juggle a personal life with children.

Mrs. Wassell (pronounced Waa-sell) doesn't compare herself to Mary Poppins, but her ideas on the care and feeding of young charges sound like the Poppins ethic.

"It's very bad for a child to just sit in front of a television and even worse for him to see you plopping down in front of the TV."

Instead, Wassell believes children enjoy walking, reading stories, sharing a bit of French poetry, and talking or acting out the ballet she loves so much.

"Too often, the first thing a parent says to me is: 'Here's the TV and help yourself to anything you want from the ice box.' I don't like to watch TV and I'm already too fat, so I don't need either of those things. I don't think that children do either."

Wassell prefers caring for smaller children. "I think that teenagers need another kind of person," she said.

"I find that caring for smaller children fulfills my grandma feelings," she noted with a grin. "It also answers the empty nest syndrome."

Her own son, Doug Wassell, is a successful dancer who lives in New York where he is associated with the David Howard School of Ballet. His wife, Starr Dennis, of the Jeffrey Ballet, appeared in "The Turning Point," she explains with pride.

Unfortunately, she said, the young

couple is so involved with careers, that her grandmother instincts may have to wait a long time before being satisfied.

"It was very happy to be a mother," she said. "Now, when I hold a baby I remember how happy I was. It's a wonderful feeling. I have one baby girl who smiles the minute I walk into the house."

**BABY SITTING** is the latest of several professions Wassell has undertaken to aid her finances. In the past she was a professional newspaper woman. Later, she was a free lance journalist, and a teacher's aid. She has worked in enough offices to know that clerical work isn't her cup of tea.

"When I decided that I needed extra money," she said, "I went to the Community House to see what people were asking for. They had a lot of things going on, and baby sitting seemed like it would be interesting."

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Wassell said that one of the greatest benefits the mature sitter can enjoy is the friendship of the families with whom she sits.

"I wish other women would follow my lead," she said. "There are so

many mothers out there who need our help."

For further information about Jeanne Wassell's project, call 649-6713. The Birmingham Community House also has information regarding baby sitting and other services.

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