

Is Mother's Career A Right Or A Privilege?

By BETTY MASSON

Mrs. Betty Elkins had a problem. Would she be a "bad mother" if she left her seven-month-old son and went back to work?

After calling her husband's attention to the problem (by kicking a hole through a door), she decided to consult her pediatrician.

The pediatrician answered her question with a question.

"Why did you pick me as your baby's doctor?" the lady asked.

"You've already made your decision," she said. Then she went on to explain that most people think there are only two kinds of mothers...those who are home and happy and those who are working and unhappy.

"There's a third kind," said the pediatrician. "The mother who works and is a better mother because of it."

Mrs. Elkins told her story Thursday at a conversation on "The Child and the Working Mother," held in Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan's Center for Continuing Education of Women.

She was one of four panelists, all of whom agreed that working is fun, but it does cause problems for a mother. Many of these problems are connected with feelings of guilt.

Mrs. Elkins decided to make use of her law degree and is employed by a firm with offices in Ann Arbor and Detroit. Her baby is now 13 months old.

Mrs. Bea Kahn was another panelist. The mother of three grown daughters, she has been working as a social worker since the youngest was three. She is employed by the Ann Arbor Child and Family Services.

Panelist Lynn Mattoon is a lecturer in philosophy and moderator of an Ann Arbor television show called "Girls and Women." She is the mother of two pre-schoolers.

Carly Houser is a doctoral student in population planning. The winner of a 1971

CEW scholarship, she is employed and has two sons, aged nine and 11.

AMONG THE interesting points were:

"Never before has society expected that a mother would take full, unrelieved care of the children...this expectation is unique...and I don't think it's a workable expectation. Even in the 1930s, the middle class family had servants," Mrs. Hauser.

"Today the average woman has her last baby when she is 26. Even if she stays home with her kids, what does she do after she's 40? Parenting is only a fraction of her life," Mrs. Hauser.

"Whether mothers feel guilty or not, three and four-year-olds are going to be in public schools," --a member of the audience concerned with child care in Ann Arbor.

"There seems to be a generational difference. We who were young mothers 20 years ago felt terribly guilty about working, partly because we enjoyed it. As a result, we were determined that no one was going to suffer because of it."

"There is an increasing feeling among young women that working is their right and not a privilege. They don't feel apologetic and they don't feel they have to knock themselves out," Mrs. Kahn.

"I've been much happier since I went back to work...I'm not messing up anyone's schedule but my own...you have to make a lot of accommodations because the family has already made accommodations," Mrs. Elkins.

"If I were two people, I'd be much happier," a working mother in the audience.

"We find repeatedly that when a woman comes into our office complaining that she can't do a thing gets a job, she can do everything," Mrs. Kahn.

"Children do take time and energy and this is a terribly personal decision," --a member of the audience.

"WE KNOW FROM statistics that you don't have any more difficulties with children when a mother works. The quality of parenting is the important thing," Mrs. Kahn.

"An active working parent is a good model for children," Mrs. Houser.

"We discussed the working mother at our agency. The discussion created a lot of emotion," Mrs. Kahn.

Each of the panelists explained how she handled some of the difficulties involved. For Mrs. Elkins and Mrs. Mattoon, pre-school child care was the important consideration.

"Once the decision was made, I first made sure my little boy was cared for in the best possible way," said Mrs. Elkins. "Then I set about getting a job. Many people do it the opposite way. I think my way is best." She found a nurse who was anxious to get away from the hospital atmosphere a few hours a day.

In order to work her schedule around that of the family, she does not stay late at the office. Instead she comes home over the dinner hour, and returns to the office after the baby is in bed. She is presently working 60 to 70 hours a week, but can get along on five hours sleep a night. Also she has no housework to worry about, and her husband's hours are flexible.

MRS. MATTOON found "you have to get out and at the same time it's more difficult to leave pre-school children." She likes having a part-time job and believes that taking children to other people's homes is the best answer, "if you can find the right home."

Calling herself "anti-institutional," she said she did not think that day-long centers were good for young children. Being in a group constantly (children need to be alone sometimes too) and being with only one age group are bad features of this type of care, she feels.

She suggested more flexible schedules for husbands and "extended families" of friends or relatives might be better answers.

Mrs. Houser, whose family consists only of herself and her sons, claims that many parents underestimate their children.

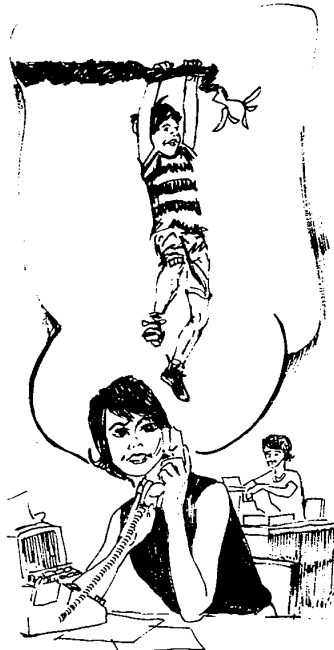
"They underestimate what children can understand and what they can do, and they don't talk things over with their children."

Among the things Mrs. Houser discusses with her children are safety procedures and emergency rules.

Each boy is responsible for his own behavior. The older is not put in charge of the younger.

"We work with a flexible schedule," she said, "and we always have something to look forward to, a movie, a concert or a trip. The early evening hours are essentially family time." Mrs. Houser has found that seeing her work on her thesis has influenced her sons to put more effort into their school projects. In fact, sometimes she has to remind them that they are not working for their doctorates, and insist that they cease.

Even for Mrs. Kahn, the problems of being working mother still exist. She still has to arrange her vacations and holidays around her daughters' plans.



ROScoe DRUMMOND, Livonia Town Hall speaker, chats with two "mothers" of American Field Service exchange students visiting in Li-

vonnia this year. Mrs. Eileen Smith is at the left and Mrs. Ruth Warner is in the center. (Observer photo by Bob Woodring)

Drummond Advises

Get Off 'Dead Center'

By MARGARET MILLER
Women's Editor

Some fundamental changes in the United States government's mode of operation would mean a stronger nation, in the opinion of Washington columnist Roscoe Drummond. Among them would be

strengthening the presidency, scrapping the seniority system in Congress and moving toward less decentralization and a stronger federal government, he told a Livonia Town Hall audience last week.

"Our political institutions

are stuck at dead center," Drummond told several hundred women in the Terrace Theater talk.

"The lobbyists get what they want. But for 30 years the predominant will of the American people has been in favor of a strong anti-gun law.

We have a weak anti-gun law. "For 30 years there has been great sentiment in favor of direct election of the President. Nothing happens. We still have the electoral college."

WHAT'S NEEDED. Continued on Page 6C

m. m. memos

One of Michigan schools' musical traditions has us running around in circles and up and down a lot of scales these days.

It was five years ago that we first heard about Solo and Ensemble Festivals. We learned quickly then they took place many miles away and involved many more young musicians performing on their instruments.

That first year our then seventh-grader joined a friend in a very simple duet and they came home delighted with blue ribbons that denoted a rating of 1.

Things have mushroomed since then. Lots of blue ribbons (and red ones that mean a 2 rating) have been awarded and carefully saved.

By the second year, two in the family were involved, and one made her first try at piano accompaniment, playing for her sister.

Another Solo and Ensemble rolled around, and they both were soloing and somewhat laboriously playing accompaniments. Sister No. 3 got into the

piano act last year, before she was eligible for the junior high level solo competition.

So we come to the current year and the final flurry of preparation. At last count we figured three instrumentalists in the family were involved in 15 events, what with clarinet, bassoon and French horn solos, an octet and a lot of playing the piano for friends.

It's the time of year when everybody practices a lot. The beat-up piano in the basement, the two music stands and the metronome get quite a workout. Also the eardrums.

One teacher asked if we had a sign-up sheet by the piano. It might be a good idea.

But in spite of all the work, the girls wouldn't think of missing the excitement of Solo and Ensemble.

And in spite of all the complications, I wouldn't miss this time of year either. It makes worthwhile all those music lessons.

--Margaret Miller



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