

Doing the best we can to raise our kids

When my eldest son was a year old and suffering from endless ear infections, I took him to a pediatrician who was not his regular doctor. The physician took his temperature, checked his ears, reviewed his chart and then peered at me over his glasses.

"Do you work?" he asked.

"Yes."

"So, your son is in daycare?"

"Yes."

"You know, he wouldn't get so many ear infections if he wasn't in daycare."

I am not good at quick comebacks, but later I thought about how I might have responded.

"Thanks for the diagnosis, Doctor, I am glad to know that my job is the source of my son's illnesses." Or maybe, "Well, that might be so, but not all of us are fortunate enough to marry rich doctors such as yourself. Some of the rest of us have to work for a living."

I married a newspaper reporter. He is a loving husband and a fantastic father, but we will not be appearing on "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" anytime soon.

I am apparently not the only woman who married for love instead of money. U.S. Census data indicate that families with two parents working are more common than two-parent families with one staying home. Nevertheless, working mothers continue to be treated as selfish scoundrels, sacrificing the souls of their children for the next SUV payment.

I am not opposed to stay-at-home mothers, but I think they are opposed to me.



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on her lifestyle.

Working mothers can do no right. No matter which choices we make, somebody is unhappy with us.

The worst part of my day is around 5 p.m. If I leave work a few minutes early to get to daycare on time, my co-workers look pointedly at their watches, making it clear that they think I'm a slacker. As I drive to the daycare center, I break all speed limits just to arrive right at closing time. The daycare director stands at the door, pointing to her watch to indicate my tardiness is not acceptable (she also charges me \$1 per child for each minute past 5:30 p.m. that it takes me to vacate the premises.)

I went on the Internet to find a book about working mothers – I like to read about how others cope. I read some comments about a book written by a working mother. The reader reviews said, "How dare she work! It's clear from her book that she could afford not to," and "How selfish of her to choose work over her children." They weren't reviewing her work they were pronouncing judgment

The reward for running through this daily gauntlet is being reunited with my sons (who are, once again, disappointed at being the last children to leave the building.)

I'm doing the best I can to meet everyone's expectations. I'm trying to be an excellent mother, and excellent employee, and adequate wife (something's got to give!) But on most days it is not possible to be all of those things.

I asked my husband, "Does it bother you that our boys are in daycare?"

He answered, sensibly, "If I thought it was harming them, it would bother me. But it's not harming them. I think it's good for them."

My sons are in an excellent daycare. The staff is loving, attentive and trained in child development. The Center is fun, clean and bright. The curriculum is progressive.

My sons like their teachers. They enjoy their classmates. If, indeed, the majority of learning occurs in the first three years of life, I feel really good about what my sons are learning because they are interacting with children and adults of various races, genders and socioeconomic levels. What skill could be more important than learning tolerance for people who are different from you?

Parenting is a challenging job, no matter how you approach it. Working mother, single mother, stay-at-home parent – we all try to do the best we can for our kids. We could help each other by concentrating on that task, instead of trying to tear each other down.

In the end, tolerance and empathy might be the best medicines of all.