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OCTOBER 2006

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Lisa Wilson of Laguna Niguel  
with Alexandria, 6, and  
Garrett, 9 months

# Working Moms

Portraits of lives  
on the go

SPECIAL REPORT: ★ Bush & Gore on Family Issues ★

## The Working Mother Today

Worldly work in the service of family

The shock of the new has worn off. Society no longer blinks in naive amazement at moms who bring home the bacon and fry it up in a pan. Nor do those moms care to run around singing songs about their accomplishments. The banners have come down. The band is quiet. Life, for working mothers, goes on. To be sure, there are still issues: equal pay for equal work, family leave, child

care in the workplace. But the fact of the working mom is now part of the fabric of our culture. Frankly, the "revolution" of the '70s was really just a restoration – historically, most moms on the planet have had to work to help support the family. Many of them, in fact, never left the workplace, not even in the cozy American '50s.

With the martial tunes of societal change playing softer now, we have a chance to look at working moms not as vanguards of a movement or case studies for a phenomenon, but as individuals. Some work out of passion. Some work because they have no choice. All work with the hope that their efforts beyond family borders will enrich the life

within those borders.

Here are today's working mothers: moms on their own, moms who've found creative ways to balance their time, moms who work together with dads as well-oiled parenting machines and moms who know that even full-time life on the home front is, if not a "job," certainly an adventure.

– By Greg Blake Miller

# Working



Attorney Lisa Wilson of Laguna Niguel with Alexandria, 6, and Garrett, 9 months.

## On the Job

Lisa Wilson is one of millions marching into the workplace

By Jennifer Leuer

When Lisa Wilson packs her children into the back seat of her Lexus and heads off to court in the morning, she follows a line of male commuters out of her Laguna Niguel development. She is one of a few mothers in her neighborhood who works outside the home.

But she is certainly not alone.

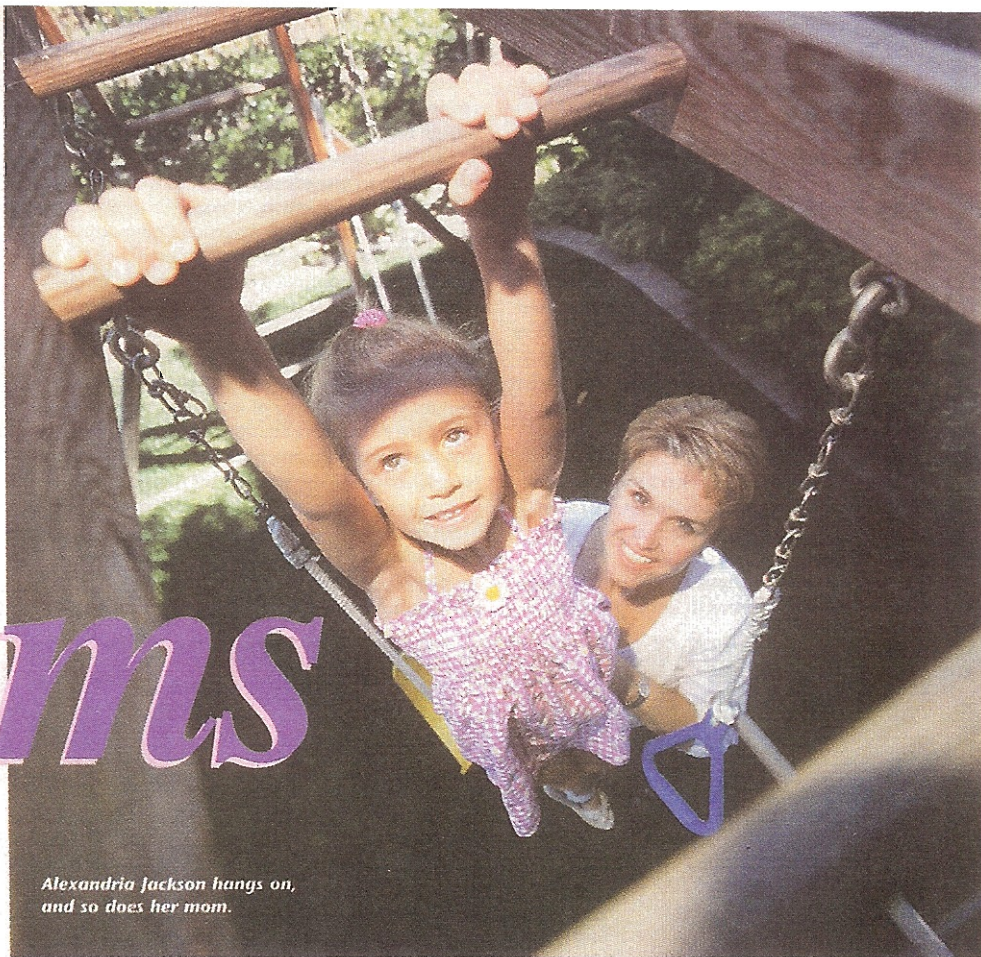
Wilson is one of millions of American working moms. It is a lifestyle that some respect and others criticize, but one that more women are choosing. Nearly 68 percent of women in the country's 24.9 million married-couple families are employed, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. Add to that 75 percent of all single moms – or another 5.7 million women – who march daily into the workplace.

Call them Super Moms, moms-on-the-run or just plain tired people. They have inspired new workplace laws and prompted national debates about women's roles. Their swelling ranks have spawned new Internet sites and magazines offering tips on juggling home and work life. Coaches and counselors stand ready to help working moms create a master plan for life. But as tough a calling as it may be, many moms wouldn't have it another way.

"I think you have to make sacrifices at both ends," Wilson says. "There are days when I feel I'm missing something at home or missing something at work, but most of the time I wouldn't trade it for the world."

Wilson and her husband, Mitch Jackson, have two children – Alex, 6, and 8-month-old Garrett. The couple run a law firm. They met in law school at Western State University College of Law in Fullerton and began practicing as a team shortly after they married in 1988. Working side by side came easily to the pair, who both grew up watching their parents run family businesses. Wilson's mom went back to work when her daughter was in the third grade, helping her husband with their dairy distribution business. Jackson's parents ran a dude ranch in Arizona.

# Moms



Alexandria Jackson hangs on, and so does her mom.

Photo by David Michaelis

Jackson says he provided little input when Wilson was deciding whether she would work after Alex was born. He wanted her to follow her heart. That part was easy – Wilson loved her career as an attorney too much to give it up. Making it work came easier than they expected. Wilson's parents moved into a home a block away and offered to take care of their first grandchild. Now they care for both during the day. Wilson and Jackson, who were accustomed to splitting up office duties, do the same with day-to-day parenting. Mornings start at 6 a.m. with Jackson helping dress Alex or changing the baby while Wilson makes breakfast and prepares bottles.

"Mitch is, I have to say, well, I got lucky," she says. "He's always been very respectful of me and we've always been very much equal partners."

There have been tradeoffs. Lack of sleep. No more trips to the gym. Patting her couch, Wilson says she doesn't get to tend to the house as much as she'd like to. On most days, she has more flexibility than other

working moms. Jackson can hold down the office or cover an appointment if Alex needs to go to the doctor. But sometimes she's in court, which hampers flexibility. If Alex's birthday falls on a day when Wilson is in trial, the celebration has to wait for the weekend.

While her husband is quick to support her, the legal industry has been slower to embrace working mothers, Wilson says. During her time in other law firms, she saw moms on partnership tracks asking for flexible schedules and getting turned down. She says it's improving, but slowly. In other industries, progress has been faster. New laws aim to equalize the workplace and companies often offer incentives such as on-site child care or flexible schedules to attract bright workers with children.

But those changes have been a long time coming. Female migration into the workplace stepped up as the nation moved from an agricultural economy to an industrial one, experts say. Women in farming families regularly balanced caring for children and their home with working on the farm, according to Cynthia Harrison, an associate professor at George Washington University who wrote an article chronicling women's changing role in American society for a 1997 federal report. But in urban areas, middle-class families survived on the husband's income, Harrison says. In 1920, when about one-quarter of Americans still lived on farms, about 9 percent of married women worked

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## By the numbers

- The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 1999 there were 24.9 million married-couple families (those who have children under 18 years old living with them). In most of these households, the woman worked. Nearly 17 million mothers, or 68 percent, were employed.

Another 5.7 million women who headed single-parent households, approximately 75 percent of the families maintained by women, also worked.

However, fewer women with younger children were employed, compared to those with older ones. Nearly 61 percent of the mothers who had children under 6 years old worked, compared to approximately 75 percent with children ages 6-17. The same held true for single-parent households, 79 percent versus 67 percent, respectively.

- The bureau also reported that in May 1997, about 25 million full-time wage and salary workers had flexible work schedules that allowed them to vary the time they began or ended work. The proportion of workers with such schedules was 27.6 percent, up sharply from the 15.1 percent recorded when the data were last collected in May 1991.

Parents were more likely than workers with no children under 18 to work a flexible schedule, 28.9 percent and 26.8 percent, respectively. Approximately 3.9 million mothers had such an employment arrangement in 1997.

- The number of individuals who work at home is on the upswing as well. Though specific numbers are not available on working mothers, the report showed more than 21 million people did some work at home as part of their primary job in May 1997.

More than half of those working at home were wage and salary workers who were not paid expressly for their time worked at home. About 17 percent, however, were wage and salary workers who were paid for the hours they put in at home. Virtually all the remainder were self-employed workers, nearly two-thirds of whom had home-based businesses.

- Fathers have a long way to go before they catch up with moms in time spent with their children, according to a study at the University of Maryland. In 1965, dads spent 2.7 hours daily with their kids in 1965. In 1998, the amount of time rose to 4 hours. At this rate, it won't be until 2053 that dads will be spending as much time as moms.

- More children are accompanying their parents on business trips. According to the Travel Industry Association of America, more than 32 million business trips in 1998 included children, up 32 percent over 1997.

Sources: The U.S. Department of Labor and Working Mother magazine.

outside the home.

As the Great Depression descended, more urban women began to work out of need, and at the start of World War II, nearly 15 percent of wives were working. That number more than doubled as male workers went off to war. Rosie the Riveter was emblematic of women's war efforts. Returning soldiers replaced many women — creating the Baby Boom that began in 1946 — but the expanding economy provided new jobs in teaching, nursing and offices. By 1960, nearly one-third of American wives worked at least part time. Their paychecks helped pay for their children to go to college or that new convertible.

In 1961, President Kennedy established a commission on the status of women to help society reconcile their mothers' dual responsibilities in the workplace and family. The idea was copied in nearly all the states and prompted legislation to prohibit paying

women less than men. Other changes have followed, including a 1978 law that barred employers from discriminating against pregnant women along with President Clinton's Family and Medical Leave Act, which required employers to help workers meet family responsibilities.

Harrison concludes that the right of married women — and mothers — to work outside the home is no longer a question. However, she says the relationship between husbands and wives continues to evolve and women still shoulder most of the responsibility for taking care of children and the home.

One look at the many "working mom" Web sites and magazines confirms this. Articles offer tips for picking child-care providers, recipes for quick-fix meals and tips to carve out more "me time." Many mothers complain to write-in columnists that while they work the same hours as their husband, the household duties aren't equally divided. Dad gets to stop at the gym on the way home or watch a ballgame while mom makes dinner and puts the kids to bed.

But who's to blame? That scenario is often played out because working moms have a hard time letting go of their traditional role as homemaker, says Natalie Gahrman, a coach for working moms.

## From Home

More moms find the flexibility of being there

By Joanna Miller

**I**n an upstairs home office at the bottom of a Southern California cul-de-sac, Delana Turner keeps books for her clients, completes tax returns and handles other accounting duties. She quit commuting when her last baby was born.

Next door, Cory Schaeffer comes downstairs each morning to her well-equipped office, which doubles for a guest room when Grandma stays. There, she runs the sales end of her Utah-based audio technology partnership.

Across the street, this freelance writer starts most days before dawn by checking on her sleeping boys and heading down the hall to the office. She became a work-at-home mom when a newspaper reporter's job kept her too long away from her small children.

The three Simi Valley professionals are part of a burgeoning nationwide trend that envelops more than 21 million Americans who work from their homes. Experts estimate that America's work-at-home force is growing by 20 percent per year. About half of those are women, many with families, experts say.

lucrative sales job 18 months ago to start her own company. "Now, I can do my East Coast business early and wrap things up around 4 to spend some time with the kids. I can also hit the gym in the middle of the day."

The work-at-home option offers a sane solution to the daily dilemmas of the working mother: whether to pump milk or give up nursing as a new mom; what to do when the school calls saying your child must be picked up at once; whether to call in sick when your child can't go to school or day care; how to handle a sad child who just needs a few minutes of your time and a hug. It also reduces the stress and expense of the commute and office dress.

For the employer, the work-at-home option boosts employee morale and motivation, increases productivity 20 percent and cuts overhead costs by the same significant percentage, says Elham Shirazi, a Southern California-based consultant who helps employers design, implement and evaluate telecommuting programs. In fact, work-at-home is such a

sought-after benefit that employers use it in their recruitment programs, she says.

"Employers do it because it makes sense for them. Most telecommuters work longer than those who work in the office. And it's a lot easier to get your work done when

you don't have the office cooler talk."

Shirazi says major companies such as IBM and American Express and most of the nation's eight largest accounting firms have implemented telecommuting programs for one to five days a week.

Ernst & Young, a national accounting firm with

She says women, by nature, want to control their home and child-rearing. They refuse help or criticize how someone else, such as their husband, performs a task.

Gahrman works with mothers individually to help them fuse their personal and professional lives. She also hosts a gathering of working moms who meet by phone monthly, publishes newsletters for working parents and hosts workshops on relationships, attaining balance in your life and reducing stress.

"Very often, although they want help, they are not willing to ask for it or accept it when it's available," she says. "Women have to be more willing to truly relinquish control if they want more equality at home."

Wilson says she ends up shopping for the family and taking care of much of the housework because she's good at it. Jackson has other responsibilities, such as taking care of the family pets. Having two full-time salaries also allows them to hire people to help with things at which they're not good, like household repairs. Getting others to help, she says, allows both parents to spend more time with their children and also give back to society. Both Wilson and Jackson are Rotarians and have been former presidents of their local chapter.

Still, there are many mornings when it is tough to say goodbye and go to work.

"Those are the hard times when you feel like you're missing things, didn't get to be there," she says. "Garrett had his first tooth and it broke through at my mom and dad's. I have to remind myself that it's the same thing as if I was off grocery shopping or doing something else. A lot of women who stay home are doing a lot of things that draw them away, too."

But there also are the evenings when she returns home from a day in court, chats with some of the stay-at-home moms and knows she made the right choice for her.

"Sometimes I can tell when I come home in my suit and they're crazed with kids driving them nuts all day," she says. "They'll say, 'Oh gosh, you got dressed up.' There's just a big difference when you're

offices in Orange County, recently reduced overhead by eliminating 150 work spaces. When employees must come to the office, they make reservations for computer docking stations through an arrangement called "hoteling." Such an arrangement is now in place at Ernst & Young's new office building in Irvine.

"You can imagine the savings," Shirazi says.

The Simi Valley cul-de-sac, where three of five moms choose the work-at-home option, is not typical, even in a commuter city like this Los Angeles suburb. However, it reflects a changing mentality as America's do-it-all women of previous decades strive for better balance between work and family in the new millennium.

"Many working mothers feel guilty; they feel they should be spending more time with their kids," says Scott Coltrane, a UC Riverside professor of sociology. "Working at home allows them control over that time. They can begin to structure work around their kids, and that's a great benefit."

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*"Now I can do my east coast business early  
and wrap things up around 4.*

**TO SPEND SOME TIME WITH MY KIDS."**

— *Work-at-home mom Cory Schaeffer*

Whether the at-home worker is an entrepreneur, a full-time employed telecommuter or an assembly-worker or envelope stuffer, working at home offers a mostly unrivaled flexibility.

"Before, when my office was in West Hollywood, it was impossible to get to the kids' awards assemblies or school activities," says Schaeffer, who quit a

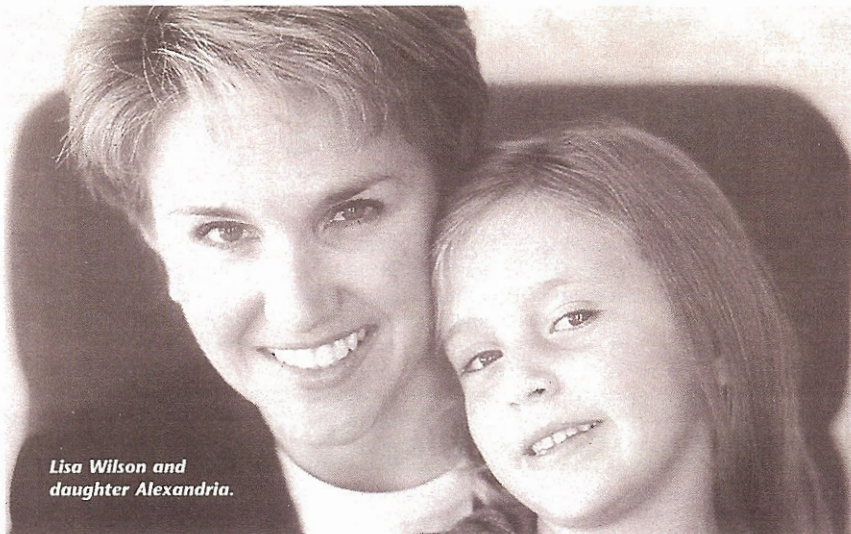
working and when you're not."

Why more moms have moved back into the workforce is a more complicated answer. Many say they would prefer to stay home with their children if finances weren't so tight. But researchers have found that women's desire to work goes far beyond economics.

A 1997 U.S. News & World Report article concluded that many working middle-class parents – especially moms – deceived themselves about why they worked. For the bottom third to half of the workforce, two incomes can make a big difference when it comes to putting food on the table and clothing children. But middle-class families were as likely to have both parents working, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Gahrman says women work to fulfill personal needs and to ensure financial freedom in addition to paying the bills.

"Women are more educated and skilled than they were a number of years ago, so they are in better positions and careers than earlier generations," she says. "Thus, there's often been more of an investment of



Lisa Wilson and daughter Alexandria.

time, education, training and expenses to achieve the job opportunities they are pursuing. Many women continue working after children because they don't see that they have a choice or they can't see themselves as 'just a mom' at home."

Small businesses and telecommuting have already begun to boost opportunities for mothers wanting to work and still have quality time for their children. Home-based Internet businesses are expected to increase those opportunities as well as growing numbers of companies adopting family-friendly policies. On-site child-care centers, flexible hours, extended leave, work-at-home days are steadily becoming part of companies' benefits.

Gahrman says she is encouraged that such policies will continue growing in popularity and will eventually erase the divide between working moms and dads.

"Men will start demanding more flexibility and time to be with their families, too," she says. "People are growing more self-aware. It will be more about having an integrated, full life that works and less about juggling and balancing."

Wilson says she's lucky she could choose to continue with her career or stay at home. They could have made it work on Jackson's salary alone. Jackson adds that they want Alex to have that same choice when she has a family.

"The way we're raising both of our kids, but our daughter especially, is that she can do anything she wants to and she

can practice any profession

she desires because it has nothing to do with her gender," Jackson says. "So you kind of have to live by example. It's important more young ladies, more young adults understand that just because they get married and have a family doesn't mean their opportunity to contribute to society stops. In fact, if they do it right, their chances to make a difference probably increase."

Jennifer Leuer of Anaheim is a regular contributor to OC Family Magazine. To reach her: [jleuer@earthlink.net](mailto:jleuer@earthlink.net)

# "Believe it or not, I got all these gifts even before I was born!"

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