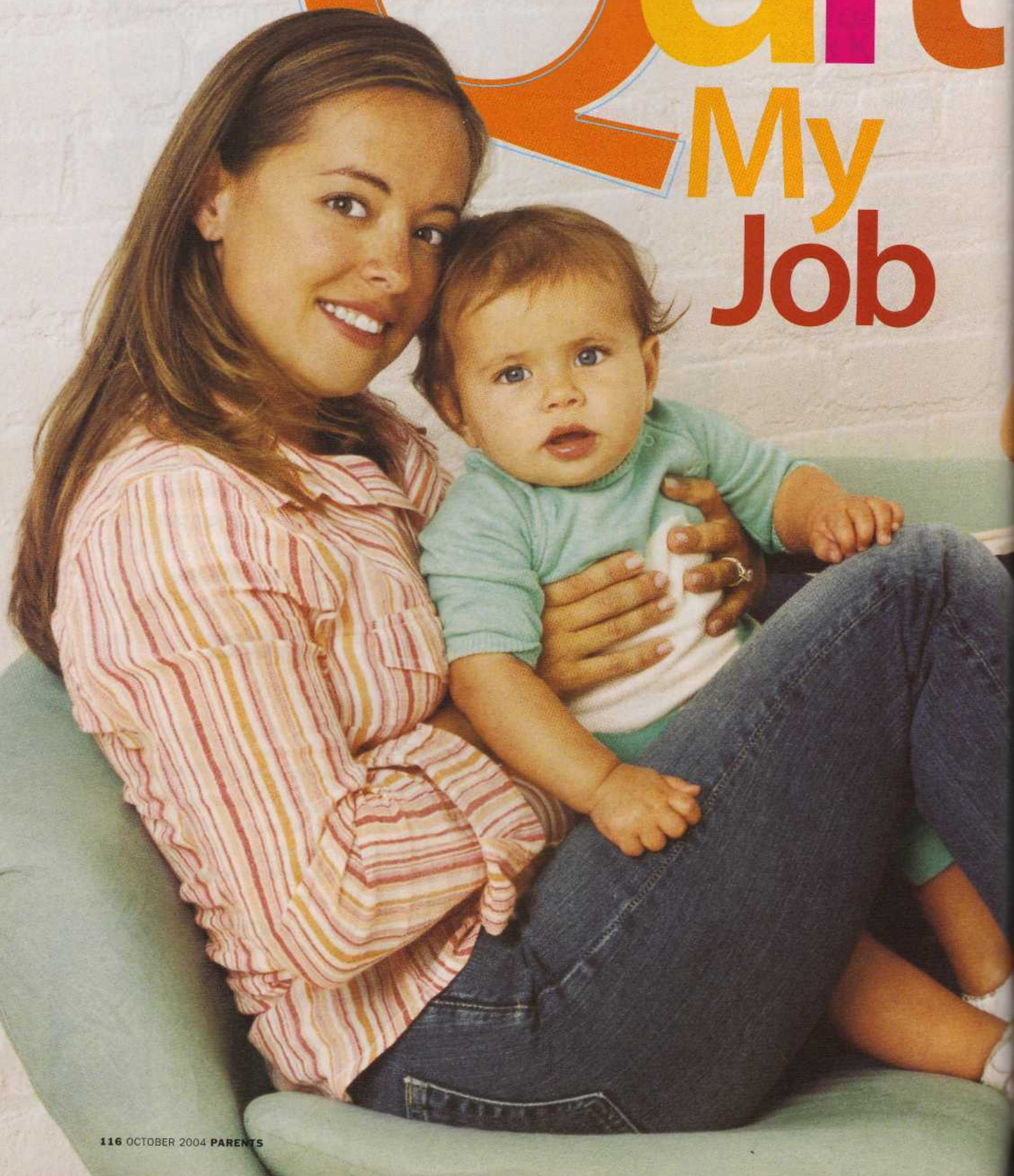


Why I

Quit

My
Job



"With three kids, I had too much to juggle."

The job she quit: Administrative assistant for a financial-services company

Reason for leaving: My oldest son was going into his second year of preschool, my middle child was 2, and I was pregnant. Not only was I working long hours, but I was commuting 45 minutes each way. I began to wonder whether my job was worth all the aggravation—and I eventually decided it wasn't.

Money matters: My husband earns \$55,000 a year as a carpenter. At first, I couldn't imagine how we would manage without my salary. But we sat down and figured out that with the cost of day care, eating out, and a work wardrobe, my \$28,000-a-year job wasn't netting all that much. Still, we've had to become a lot more conscious of how we spend—and we've retired our credit cards!

Biggest challenge: I'm nowhere near as organized as I was when I was working. When my days were more structured, I somehow was able to accomplish a lot more. Even though I'm home all day, most nights I still end up with a pile of dishes in the sink and unfinished laundry. I'm trying to discipline myself to become more efficient.

Greatest satisfaction: I've discovered that you don't need money to be happy.

To me, happiness comes from hearing people say "What nice kids you have" or "Your children are so well behaved." Another thing: Life is more relaxed for all of us now that I'm home.

Future plans: I don't have any real plans. For now, I'm just focusing on my kids.

MICHELE-LEE SHEA, 33, Brimfield, Massachusetts. Mother of Jakob, 6, Nickolas, 4, and Patrik, 2



"I didn't want my children in day care."

The job she quit: Teacher

Reason for leaving: I quit when Marcellus was 18 months old, in large part because of the difficulty I had finding good, affordable child care. My son had already had two different caregivers. Then he got a bad stomach virus, and I needed to take a lot of time off from work to nurse him. I knew that could happen again—kids get sick a lot in day care. So I decided to stay home.

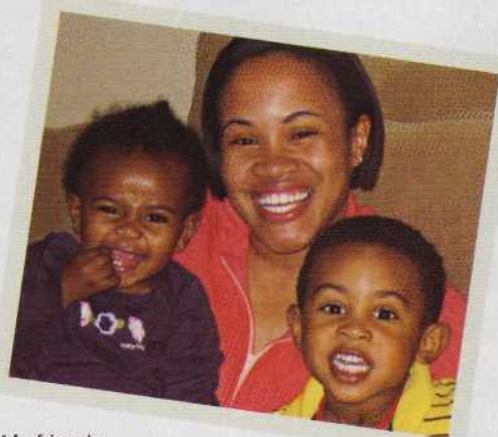
Money matters: My husband is an account executive at an office-machine company and can earn up to \$75,000 a year. Now that I'm home, he can devote more time to work and maximize his earnings.

Biggest challenge: In my social circle, no one stays home. My friends are constantly asking, "Why aren't you working?" and "When are you going back?" I hate having to explain myself and feel reluctant to tell them what I really think: I'm not comfortable with a child being raised by someone other than his parents.

Greatest satisfaction: Kids absorb so much during their early years. I'm happy to be the one shaping their morals and values. I'm also thrilled to be such a big part of their everyday lives.

Future plans: I may go back to teaching when my children are older. For now, though, I'm living the life I always dreamed about. In truth, I always wanted to be a stay-at-home mom. □

MONICA POLAND, 27, Philadelphia. Mother of Marcellus, 3, and Milan, 1



"Working didn't make financial sense."

KATE ORTEGA, 25,
Port Orchard,
Washington.
Mother of
Caroline, 3½

The job she quit: Retail salesclerk

Reason for leaving: My salary—barely above minimum wage—wasn't enough to cover the cost of child care. It didn't make sense for me to work.

Money matters: My husband, Dan, an electrical laboratory technician on a U.S. Navy submarine, earns about \$45,000 a year—and that's what we live on.

Biggest challenge: I'm home with my daughter all the time, and frankly, I find my life can get a bit boring and mundane. I miss having a reason to put on makeup and get dressed in the morning. And I especially miss being around other people and having normal, adult conversations. I can't afford to go places with Caroline every day. Raising a kid is expensive: We don't have money for frivolous spending.

Greatest satisfaction: I get great joy out of seeing Caroline imitate me. She likes to put on her sparkly lip gloss when she sees me putting on lipstick. And recently, when a playmate fell, she ran over to her and said, "You've got to be more careful." That's just what I would've said to her! I really enjoy being her role model.

Future plans: My ideal job would be to work as a wedding planner. Once my daughter is in preschool, I'm going to try to start a business from home.



"I found a way to earn money at home."

The job she quit: Manager of a photo-print shop

Reason for leaving: For one thing, I worried that my kids were closer to my mother-in-law, who'd been watching them, than they were to me. When I'd pick them up, they clearly wanted to stay with her—and I don't blame them. Most evenings, I was too tired to play.

Money matters: My husband earns around \$35,000 working for his family's fencing company. We calculated that we could survive financially if I helped him out with the business so he could cut his expenses. So now I work 15 hours a week at home doing the bookkeeping.

Biggest challenge: Right after I quit, I was really depressed. I'd been around people all the time, and I missed the companionship. It's gotten easier now that I've hooked up with a bunch of other moms. We've joined a bowling league together, and we meet at a café once a week with our kids.

Greatest satisfaction: One of my daughters just came inside and handed me some flowers she'd picked. It's those little moments that I really treasure—and there are lots of them, day after day.

Future plans: I'd like to be a writer and hope to work toward that goal as my kids get older. But right now, I'm happy to be doing what I'm doing.

SARAH RAUSCH, 28,
Chelsea, South Dakota.
Mother of twins Rachel
and Andrea, 6,
Cody, 2, and Logan,
4 months



The number of women leaving work to be home with their children is on the rise. Who are these moms, and what's motivating them?

Here, meet five women who explain the joys and the challenges of staying home. By Sally Farhat



"My career was too high-pressure."

The job she quit: Attorney at a large corporate law firm

JULIE TURAJ, 32,
New York City.
Mother of
Samantha, 3,
and Kaitlyn, 1

Reason for leaving: I had a demanding job. In one year, I pulled 16 all-nighters and often worked entire weekends. It wasn't just the long hours

that got to me—the pressure was enormous too. I was planning on going part-time after Kaitlyn was born, but I knew even that would be hard to manage.

Money matters: I was well compensated, but my husband, Rob, works in the financial industry and earns a good salary. We're very lucky: Money wasn't a significant issue.

Biggest challenge: Some people think I've done a disservice to women by having the opportunities I've had and then not going for the brass ring. I feel bad about that. It's also been tough having to redefine my self-image. It took me a while before I could say "I'm a full-time, stay-at-home mom" without feeling inadequate.

Greatest satisfaction: A job will always be there, but kids grow up in the blink of an eye. I really enjoy going to playgroups and birthday parties, and just being around for every one of my daughters' milestones.

Future plans: I know I'll go back to work eventually. I'd like to practice a more emotionally satisfying kind of law, such as being a victims' advocate or working at a nonprofit agency. My goal is to leave the world a better place—and I'm starting with my children.