

# Tales of Three Mothers

Mothers have been employed forever, and forever they have agonized over what happens to their children when they are not able to care for them.

In 1985, mothers continue to agonize. But there is a difference. Today more women are making connections – connections between the plight of their children and the backwardness of this society.

*Brenda:* With her first-born, a 5½-month-old boy in her arms, just dropped in to say that she, a very traditional woman, had been searching for care for her baby and was totally undone by feelings of hurt and betrayal.

Why betrayal? Well, she had really gotten into mothering – did all the good things: quit smoking while pregnant, didn't drink, exercised, ate well, breast-fed – did it all and loved her baby boy.

"But how," she asked, tears in her eyes, "How can I leave him with someone I don't know – someone I got through the classifieds? He can't talk – I don't know what his day will be like – I can't do it, but my leave is up."

(In Canada there are licensed day care spaces for about 10% of children under two years of age whose parents – or single parents – are in the paid labour force full-time or more than half-time.)

*Gloria:* A mother of a four-year-old in licensed care (with a child staff ratio of 9:1) recently boiled over when she thought about her child's needs in light of her daily experience as an employment counsellor.

"They talk about responsible government. That's a laugh! On one hand, I see my child in need of more attention, more adult contact; and on the other hand, I see thousands of people begging for a job – with no hope of getting a first job."

*June:* A Toronto nurse, who always thought good day care was simply a matter of having enough money, recently shared a conversation she overheard in the hospital. Apparently, a three-year-old had fallen while in the care of a woman who was struggling on her own with nine others.

This care was cheaper than a licensed centre, and the mother was overheard to say to her husband: "If you'd stop smoking, we could use the extra \$80 a month for the centre I want for him."

June said it chilled her. Why should the quality of an innocent child's care depend on whether his father smokes or not? She concluded: "We need the centres, high quality and all – not the money being given out to the parents."

## NEVER HAD AN ANNIVERSARY

*(for Marvynne)*

You never had an anniversary  
to celebrate the salt and sugar  
of societies' legal ties,  
no one craves the same diet forever;  
soup 'n salad, oil & vinegar, sweet and sour,  
so the menu changes

for you  
relationships were always more  
honestly negotiated  
using feelings and attractions  
not property and titles  
to bind your days with formality

your heart ignoring  
practicalities of proven recipes  
letting you taste  
a variety of experiments

yet sometimes the ingredients  
burst into mouth-watering  
passion fruit.

*Bernice Lever*  
Richmond Hill, Ontario