

cal caring to socialization to managing interpersonal relations. It becomes less physically demanding but in many ways, more emotionally and psychologically demanding.

At some point her children begin to leave home and eventually the last child leaves for good. Because child bearing and rearing are such intense and all-consuming occupations, when the work ends, many women experience a period of profound shock which has been referred to as 'the empty nest syndrome.'³ Given the strength of the myth of motherhood in women's lives, their self-identity, often their main reason for existing, is bound up in their children. When the children leave, the women are often at loose ends. The other aspects of their domestic work seem somehow irrelevant.

I used to cook and clean for eight of us and now there's only two so what's the point? It was the children who made my work worthwhile.

(Generation II, b. 1925)

In many ways this period in a woman's life is comparable to retirement for men. Everything that she has done on a daily basis for at least sixteen years suddenly changes. A major component of her work ceases. What distinguishes women's domestic work from men's wage work is that in fact, she does not retire. The child bearing and rearing component of domestic work may end, but the rest of it continues.

These shifts in mothering are closely related to shifts in the other components of domestic work. Improvements in domestic technology transformed the labour process of housework, reducing the amount of necessary labour time and making its organization more flexible. As a result, it was possible for child care to expand. As both housework and child care were re-organized, it became increasingly possible for women to move into wage work.

These shifts and reallocations of women's labour time have not necessarily occurred smoothly or easily. The increasing intensity of child care and the importance placed upon it have created new sources of frustration and anxiety for the mother. The demands of child care continue to conflict with the demands of the other aspects of women's domestic labour.

Notes

1. Generation I refers to women who set up households in Flin Flon between 1925 and 1939; Generation II set up households between 1940 and 1959 and Generation III between 1960 and 1977.

2. H. Gavron, *The Captive Wife* (London: Penguin, 1966).

3. P. Bart, 'Depression in Middle-Aged Women,' in V. Gornick and B. Moran, eds., *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).



Laura Jones

Cooperative Preschool Associations

Apprenticeship for What?

JUDITH SALES

Une mère met en question la 'valeur marchande' de son travail dans une association pré-scolaire.

Why couldn't I be the perfect mother? I met all of Statistics Canada's requirements: I had a son and a daughter, lived in a split level house with a 9-5 husband and a conventional mortgage, sandbox and dog. If the statistics people were to be believed, the only thing I was lacking was the .4 of a child, but that I was willing to give to someone who had a .6!

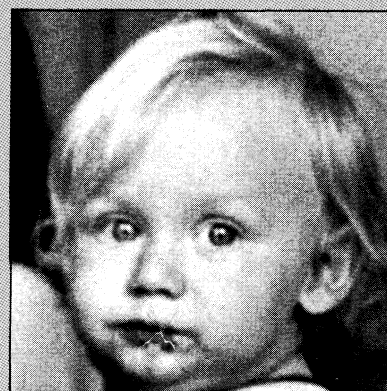
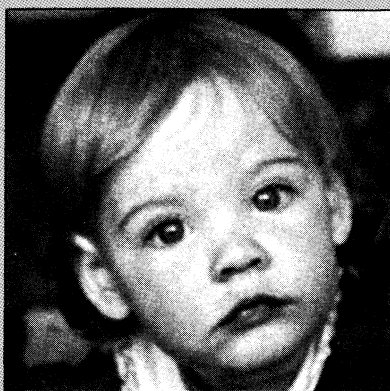
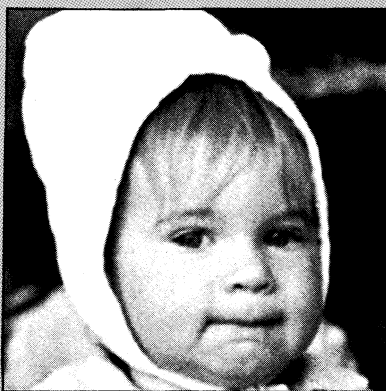
I considered myself a professional woman. I had attended university, travelled, taught in England and Canada, had postponed maternity for years after marriage. I had prepared myself mentally as well as physically to stay at home and be a Super Mom. How then could I explain what three years of motherhood had done to my self-confidence and emotions? It seemed cowardice to admit that I was bored with domesticity, that I was finding soap operas exciting or that my bedside table was piled high with child-rearing books and Harlequin romances. (The ones that had a

cook and a maid were especially appealing.)

While I was a working woman, I could never understand my friends with children. Not for me, those hours of exchanging child-rearing anecdotes. I vowed my child and I would spend happy hours in stimulating play. After children, that vow, along with 'my child will never eat candy' and 'my child will never throw a tantrum' went quickly out the window.

When I first heard about cooperative preschools I was delighted. I listened to all the advantages of co-ops: of children playing with peers and parents supporting each other, and of the advantages of educational programs, but none of them for me, measured up to the two and a half hours of free time they gave me twice a week. It looked as if there would be lots of things for my child to do. And the supervisor seemed very pleasant, the other children friendly, so I enrolled my son.

An orientation meeting for the parents (mainly mothers) in my son's new class surprised me. Here I found other women who were having almost exactly the same problems as I was. They too had had to make major adjustments in their lifestyle.



Dates of informal beach and park meetings were given out so we could get together during the summer.

The supervisor spoke to us about the program for the children. Good thing! Until then I somehow thought they put fifteen children into a room of toys and locked the door for two and a half hours. Duty days as well as jobs were explained; each family had a job within the preschool, ranging from looking after the pets, to organizing field trips to cleaning toilets. An elected executive took on additional responsibilities.

When I started attending the monthly meetings I was surprised that our sixty-member school handled \$20,000 a year and had more invested in equipment. Women who had had little contact with the business world were preparing financial statements, hiring supervisors, training new parents, revising bulky constitutions, drafting contracts and chairing meetings. Talents that had been hidden in the diaper pail for years suddenly became conspicuous. Involvement at the preschool level proved to be an ideal halfway house between the home and the outside world. Mothers who came into the preschool unsure and insecure were emerging at the end of two or three years with confidence and skills which they thought either never existed or were gone forever.

In Victoria, where I started my preschool experience, co-ops have been functioning for over thirty-five years. Starting in 1944 with only a few children and parents, the movement grew until it became apparent that the preschools needed to co-ordinate their efforts. They formed the Vancouver Island Cooperative Preschool Association (VICPA), which was to act as a clearing house for information and to prevent the duplication of effort by different preschools. Representatives from twenty island preschools now make up this organization. Meeting monthly, they exchange ideas, report on government regulations, write up guidelines on various executive positions, publish an eight-page newsletter and provide a consulting service for new preschools. No funding comes from the government; each family contributes to the expense.

Over the years the role of this parent group has expanded. Three years ago it hired a part-time secretary to run the office, handle correspondence and keep daily office hours. It also pays a senior supervisor to work with new supervisors to orient them into the cooperative philosophy. However, mothers still provide all the impetus in the VICPA. These women sit as representatives to government agencies, licensing boards and consumer councils. Recently, the organization has begun sending a vice-president to a community coordinating committee on learning opportunities for women in Victoria, and participating in local Status of Women conferences. Five years ago VICPA was instrumental in setting up a cooperative school run by the public school board.

We realized that there was yet another sphere for preschools. We had been receiving and enjoying the publications of the PCPI (Parents Cooperative Preschools International) for several years but always considered ourselves too insignificant to contribute to such an obviously high powered organization, which held annual conferences all over North America. However, when our sister council in Vancouver hosted one in 1975 we attended. It turned out that our VICPA president was a member of the board and eligible to vote but was there too late for all their meetings. Two years passed before we went again—this time to Los Angeles where we were on time for the PCPI meetings.

Our feelings of inadequacy were short-lived. Not only were we among the best organized, supported and diversified of the councils, we were also the most expensive! Requests came for copies of our booklets, portfolios, programs and standards.

At the conference we learned how to run a huge fundraiser and where to go for more books and information on running our association. We worked up the courage to hold our own community-wide all-day conference with the University of Victoria in 1978. Now an annual event, this conference has been very successful in bringing in early childhood education specialists as well as speakers on the problems mothers

and parents face. In 1981 we are hosting the week-long PCPI annual conference at the University of Victoria.

The VICPA grew within its parent organization just as a mother grows within her preschool. There is a difference, however. The VICPA, with the constant influx of new and keen parents can keep growing and changing, but what of the mother whose child finishes preschool? Earlier I said women were emerging from these preschools with new confidence and skills. That is true. But what can be done with these talents? How can we get the business world to accept the experience as well as the learning these women have acquired?

For many of these women, their child's entry into public school means the end of the challenges and responsibilities that were theirs in the preschool setting. The knowledge gained by chairing hundreds of meetings, giving talks on preschools to other groups and of settling highly charged emotional conflicts between people is something that is ignored by an employer. For instance running a preschool might be of enormous benefit to a business but this seems impossible for the employer to understand. Had you been a bank teller for a few years before maternity and put in four or five years of intensive preschool work, as far as the employer is concerned your experience ended when you left the bank. In fact you've been standing in cotton wool ever since as far as the business world is concerned. The chances of changing your profession using the experience gained in a preschool organization are remote.

As with all types of unpaid labour (including looking after children at home), the experience gained in a preschool organization is not considered important. 'Once a volunteer always a volunteer' seems to be the judgement of most employers who toss aside this apprenticeship. Yet there are men who get huge salaries performing tasks which many preschools expect from their mother-presidents as a matter of course. Women must work together to fight for recognition of our invaluable experience as mothers and organizers. We must find a way to translate this apprenticeship into the 'working world' and make it count.