

# A comeback mom cries foul [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

'What's mommy's job?' I recently asked my five-year-old daughter. With a straight and honest face, she promptly replied: "To clean up."

It was at that moment that I realized I had to return to work, but little did I know that job-hunting would prove to be so humbling and difficult after five years away from the workplace.

My job search began late last year, and I thought I would be working by now. I believed that my absence to have and raise children wouldn't be questioned. Instead, I feel stuck in a June Cleaver time warp.

Rekha Karambayya, an associate professor of organizational behaviour at York University's Schulich School of Business in Toronto, agrees that perceptions on taking time off to have kids hasn't changed all that much over the past few decades. "Really, it's a collective issue that everyone should be concerned about, but it somehow ends up being a women's issue when it isn't."

In my pre-kids life, I was a television business journalist and a freelance writer. I defined myself by my career, and worked long hours for average pay. Then I got the opportunity of a lifetime: the chance to move to Europe.

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Legally, I couldn't work, so it was the perfect time to have children, which we did -- a girl in Holland, and a boy in Luxembourg.

But good things often come to an end, and my exotic expat life was no exception. About three years ago, we moved home to Toronto. I had planned on returning to my career immediately upon setting foot on Canadian soil, joining the more than three million Canadian working moms with young children.

Instead, I put off working for two more years and became embroiled in stay-at-home-life, caught up in a domestic whirlwind of co-ordinating play dates and juggling grocery lists. I couldn't imagine ever finding the time to work outside of the home; it was a monumental challenge just to find the time to shower.

Fast forward to 2007 and my current predicament. I've changed. I love being at home with my kids but I'm now going a bit stir crazy, and crave an identity outside of the home. I'm raring to re-enter life as a working mom.

My first challenge is the guilt. Returning to work means my kids will attend full-time daycare: My intellect says that a good daycare will provide invaluable socialization and stimulation, but my heart says I am a terrible mom for shipping my kids off somewhere else five days a week.

For more than a decade, Canadian moms have been increasingly returning to the work force. According to Statistics Canada, more than 70 per cent of Canadian mothers with children aged three to five are employed outside the home, and I bet every single one struggled with their decision to return to work.

"Now, there is more guilt," says Theresa Radwanski, an early childhood educator and supervisor of Children's Circle Daycare in Toronto. She agrees that it is harder for moms now than it was 27 years ago when she started working at the daycare.

"Years ago, moms had children and then stayed at home, whereas now it's more blended and there is not a set role. I was brought up that you worked until you got married. Now, it's not just about having children, it's also about being inspired by your job," Ms. Radwanski says.

I suppose it's good that gone are the days of defined roles, but like many mothers, I want to have both an inspiring career and a happy home life with kids. But I'm now starting to wonder if my expectations are unrealistic.

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So for now, my wisest move is to take a step back and find some part-time or contract work to test the waters and close that problematic five-year gap.

I still plan to search for that full-time career, but in the meantime I'll enjoy playing with my children, and perhaps even teach them to help

me clean up.

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- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** gender <sup>[3]</sup>

mother's labour force participation <sup>[4]</sup>

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