



I am a 38 year old, married mother with 3 children aged 11, 10 & 8. I have taken a really active part in their lives. I attend school functions, canteen, reading, sports days - the whole enchilada! Now after 11 years I have returned to the workforce. I've finally got a real job, or so my sisters' say!!

I have taken a position at the local supermarket, packing shelves at night. This was perfect for me as it allowed me to still actively be involved in the kid's activities, get the kids to school and to pick them up after. I can still be there for dinner at night & I also get to tuck them in some nights. I am back at home though when they wake up.

Day one was an induction day that goes from 8am to 5pm on a Saturday. This sounds ideal for most people as this is the weekend and would mean my husband, the father of these 3 children, would be able to take care of them and deal with the day's running around. *How wrong could I be?*

The 11 & 10 year old boys had to be at soccer at 8.30 at the local field. They both play in the same team which makes the running around easier. Kick off is 9am and they finish at 10.15am. Then our 8 year old had to be at a party at 11am, picked up at 1pm to be dropped at another party at 1.30pm and then picked up at 3.30pm. (Mind you I have laid out all the clothes required for this day the night before.)

We had a builder coming at 3pm to give us a quote to have some damage repaired from the recent Queen's Birthday weekend storms. The boys apparently pestered all day "what time will we be going fishing". At some stage I think he must have given them something to eat because the kitchen resembled a war zone when I got home at 5.30pm. I asked him how his day was and was greeted by "you have no idea what sort of day I have had".

I know that some of you will be thinking – what a poor bloke, how is he meant to do all of that & still be sane – well HELLO, what do you think I have been doing for the past 11 years. Yes, that is a typical Saturday & my significant other usually

works on a Saturday so I have to do all of that & take the other 2 to their parties as well, or play dates, or have extras over. The only thing that was out of the ordinary was the builder but, hey you have to have them when they say they are coming. I held my tongue & didn't mention the fact that the beds weren't made, the clothes line was bare and that hey dinner hadn't mysteriously appeared.

WOW!!! What a change. I think I was hit by a bus during the first two weeks in particular. I started during the July school holidays – BIG mistake!! I had the kids at home all day when all I wanted to do was crawl into bed and die. I was aching all over. I had bits that were hurting that I didn't even know I had! What was I thinking?

Initially, I started with a guaranteed 12 hours per week. The first week I worked 20 hours, had the kids home and was ironing - (oh by the way I forgot to mention that previously I would iron 15 baskets of clothes a week for other people). The second week I worked 25 hours as well as continued with the ironing & had the kids still at home. I was fast thinking I had bitten off much more than I could chew. People kept telling me that I would get used to it and I think I chewed their heads too! For this fortnight I was running on about 4 hours sleep a night.

It has gotten better though. The kids returned to school. I am slowly giving all the ironing away. I am working about 30 hours a week. This has good & bad bits. The money is great & we have already started to put away the extra money for all those things that we struggled to afford before. I also wanted to make life easier for the times that my husband is on holidays and we don't get the additional overtime. I do however really need to get a strict routine happening to ensure that I can spend the time with the kids when they are home. I sleep when they are at school and try to have dinner organized so that when I have to go to work it is easier for everyone.

What has been the best part of going back to work?

I can have a conversation with a real grown up & they can talk back. The contact with the outside world is great. I didn't realize how much I had probably missed that. And the money! Plus the sense of being a bit more than someone's mum and someone's wife – not that there is anything wrong with that - but it is nice now to be me.

What is the worst part of going back to work?

That I am tired all the time! I think this is going to get easier. I am missing out on some of the things at school because I am sleeping. I don't get to say goodnight to the kids every night.

How have the kids reacted with you returning to work?

My oldest really dislikes it. I don't know why as he isn't missing out on much but he has probably had me at home the longest so he has the most to adjust to. The others don't seem fazed – in fact I don't think they have noticed that I leave the house! Hmmm must talk to them about that.

How has your partner coped and reacted with this change?

Initially, when I was doing the ironing plus the new job he said that something had to go or he would. I told him not to let the door hit him on the way out!!! No seriously it was definitely tough trying to do both & that is why it didn't make sense to try & burn both ends of too many candles at one time. The ironing had to go and now he is starting to realise all the things that I used to do in the day. The mystery housekeeping fairy used to come everyday & now that she is working the squatters have moved in & taken over the house. No, seriously it has meant that we *both* have to get more involved in what is going on with the kids and the daily running of the house.

Which will do us all good!