



I was born in the early 1970's. Being part of "Generation X" meant, as a female, I had a many more options open to me than my mother's generation. Girls were expected to get married young & if you weren't hitched by the time you were 22 you would be "left on the shelf". She was not given any great encouragement to succeed at school nor choose a rewarding career for herself. My generation had the benefit of the "bra burning" days of the 1960's. However, with these benefits came confusion about male vs female roles in the home/workplace. There was also a high rate of divorce, our family being part of the statistic. I would say this has altered my view of marriage - I guess the mistakes your parents made are the ones you try and avoid as an adult.

On leaving school I went to University for 3 years and spent much of my 20's in a full time job & earning extra income tutoring & marking paper on weekends. During this time, I knew one day I wanted to have children but felt I was not ready for such a commitment. I did some travel through Europe and purchased my first home. I would say I was very independent during this period of my life.

In my late 20's I met John. We had a "long distance" relationship for several years, prior to getting married in 2005. It was not easy being apart, but something strong kept us clocking up the kilometers to see each other. Just after our honeymoon in New Zealand, I fell pregnant with our son Thomas.

I had a good pregnancy, only being sick once in the 9 mths. I worked up until 36 wks, which was challenging. John and I attended antenatal classes and learnt all the facts about labour and what it would be like to have a baby. I planned on having a natural birth, but after 12 hrs of labour, I had a C-Section. During the labour I had the gas and 2 shots of pethadine. Thomas was 9lb 6oz (4.4kg). John was by my side the whole time and was a great comfort to me.

Being a mother for the first time at 35 brought its advantages and disadvantages. The sleep deprivation was my worst enemy. Thomas was not a great sleeper from day one. As the days and nights rolled into each other, I would beat myself up over things I felt were not going well. The sleep routine just wasn't happening and I could not understand why I could not do this thing called "parenting". As many people will tell you, a new baby is challenging for the best of us. I would not say I had post natal depression, but for the first 6 weeks I did feel out of control. The turning point came when Thomas started to sleep longer through the night and I told myself he is a baby and I just have to do what is best for him.

I did find the breastfeeding difficult in the beginning. My milk took about a week to come in and I didn't feel confident. I perservered with the feeding, which eventually paid off. When you have mastered it, you can't believe you had so much trouble. It is so convenient to have the milk on hand wherever you go, not having to worry about formula.

John was a great help to me during this period. He did much of the cooking and domestic duties - things that I could not face for a while. The concept that my father's generation barely knew how to change a nappy seemed unbelievable to me. John went back to work when Thomas was 1 month old. By that stage I felt confident enough to look after Thomas and keep the house running. I joined a mother's group and would religiously spend much of my Tuesdays with the mums and bubs. I settled into my role of being at home with bub and life did take on a whole new meaning for me. As Thomas moved through the developmental stages like sitting and crawling, I loved him more and more by the day.

I went back to work for 4 days/week when Thomas was nearly 9 mths old. John only works 1 day/week and minds Thomas for the 4 days/week. It was easier going back to work knowing that John was looking after him as opposed to going straight into childcare. The transition back to work has gone well and I am now acting in a higher role. This has meant some extra income for us, and a reduction on the effect cutting down to 4 days/week. The down side of the extra responsibility has been longer days at work and less time spent with Thomas and John. The work/life balance is a hard one to juggle as extra income and financial security for your family can come at a cost.

I find working the 4 days/week is basically like working full-time. I try & fit a full week into the 4 days while I am at work. The hardest thing I have found is being at home for the 3 days and then having to go back into the workplace. I literally feel like I am 2 people sometimes, one being a stay-at-home mum and the other being a career woman. It is hard juggling the 2 roles, but it can be done.

A great benefit of being back in the workforce is you feel like your skills are being updated all the time and the personal time you have to yourself during lunch breaks. I quite often walk for 40 mins at lunch time. This is something I don't do as much when I am at home, as I get too caught up in caring for Thomas and domestic duties. Also, just being able to go and get a hair cut by yourself is a big thing after you have been at home caring for a baby. You take those little things for granted when you don't have kids.

When I get home from work I often feed Thomas and have a bath with him to save John the next day. While that is happening, John will cook the dinner. We have found a system of working together. You need to find what works best for you as a couple based on your strengths. For example, I handle all the finances and John will do all practical stuff like changing washers.

Thomas will soon start at a local childcare centre for 3 days/week and we will share a nanny one day/week with a woman in our mother's group. We will probably get the 4<sup>th</sup> day at the childcare centre early next year. Like anything, there are advantages and disadvantages to Thomas going to childcare. Being an only child, his social skills will develop as he learns to share with other children. They also have a structured learning program. I will find it difficult dropping him off for his 1<sup>st</sup> day, but I know he will be fine.

As to the question of any more children, we are not certain. I would ideally love a sibling for Thomas in the future. We are in a 2 b/room apartment at the moment, which would mean moving to a larger place. We would also have to buy a larger car etc. However, I don't want this decision to be based on finances. As a good friend told me, what is the purpose of accumulating assets if you have no one to leave it to?