



The Ups

and Downs of

# WVAHIMS

Bye-bye snowy commutes and daycare bills. More moms are earning a living right from their humble homes, doing work they love while always being there for their kids. Is being a work-at-home mom the best of both worlds?

BY WENDY VON BUSKIRK • ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH KOVELLE

In a college job interview, when I was asked the standard "Where do you see yourself in five years?" I tossed out a variation of this: "Working from my laptop on a beach with my kids."

Looking back, it was a terrible answer, implying a lack of ambition and faulty superior logic, but it was my vision, so I put it out into the universe.

Fast forward to today, and while it took a lot longer than expected, I'm "living the

dream."

Two years ago, after working full-time in classrooms since college, I officially joined the ever-increasing ranks of the Work-At-Home Moms.

Getting there took a few happy accidents, lots of soul searching and a super supportive husband, but I've since managed to cobble together a respectable income through freelance writing jobs for a wide range of clients. And while I haven't exactly earned ▶

# WAHMs

beachfront coed. I have been known to bring my laptop onto the dock overlooking our modest lake while the kids play in the sunbator. Not a bad life.

I no longer worry about long commutes, child care bills and heart-breaking structure of time away from my kids. If my 6-year-old son wakes up with a fever, I keep him home from school. When my 3-year-old daughter needs a snack, a nap or a quick game of "pony soccer," I'm there.

But there are new issues — namely the stress that comes with trying to balance clients, the day-to-day chaos of a live-in house, and the

occasionally constant, sometimes claustrophobic demands on my time and attention.

Sell, I wouldn't trade it for the world, and thanks to technology, a growing number of women seem to be making the same choice as me.

## JUST THE FACTS, WAHM

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 9.9 million women said they did some work at home as part of their primary job in 2004. That's 15.4 percent of the workforce, up from 13.2 in 2001.

Of those, 7.3 percent reported the reason for staying home was to coordinate their schedule with personal or family needs.

More women

## WAHM ADVICE

"At 5 o'clock I physically turn my laptop off, and on the weekends I go one step further and put it away."

— Stacy Jenkins, editor, Farmington Observer

## WAHM ADVICE

"I try to include my son or put him to work. He has his own chair, and when I am working he is allowed to use my 'special pens and markers.' He loves to retrieve pages off the printer. Pretend talking on the office phone is also one of his favorites!"

— January Thomas, president, My Gold Party, Groton Florist

statistics are hard to come by, but the demographic is no doubt on the rise. The ranks of WAHMs I know personally are certainly growing. My sister-in-law, Jan Von Buskirk, recently launched the successful catering company Jan's Ugly Pies out of her oven in White Lake. A close acquaintance, Tania Kirschner Rock, traded her position as secretary Geoffrey Fieger's secretary to set up shop as a freelance paralegal from her home in Macclesfield.

My former co-worker Stacy Jenkins now edits the Farmington Observer from her kitchen table while daughter Abby, 15, and son Evan, 6, are at school. In 2009, the

company furnished her with a mobile office and began loosening the reins. Jenkins says the lesson being there for her kids, but the downside is there's no clear-cut time to clock out.

"A curse of working at home is it's really hard to turn it off, walk away and be done for the day," she says. "There are pros and cons, but I'm making it work and I love it."

## PICTURE PERFECT CAREER

Wendie DeLano is a professional photographer who recently took on a second business out of her Livonia home. She's like



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### EVENTS:

many moms who supplement their income with direct selling, becoming a rep for jewelry and accessory company Stella & Dot.

DeLano says she alternates between being completely stressed out trying to juggle her two jobs and two children (Lilly is 6 and Owen is 5), and feeling "lazy" for skipping professional work for housework.

DeLano has developed certain techniques to combat procrastination, such as scheduling strict office hours for herself, keeping all her errands carefully organized, and devoting Monday mornings to booking parties and photo shoots. She also partners with a nearby mom to trade babysitting for stretches of work time.

"You really have to dedicate certain office hours when you are by yourself, because it's just too hard to grab a couple minutes here and a couple there," she says.

Although it can be hectic, DeLano says she wouldn't have it any other way - for now.

"I love it because this is where I want to be. They're only kids for so long," she says.

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Laura Weber left a high-pressure job with

## WAHM ADVICE

"I get up a few minutes before my kids to get dressed and do my makeup and hair before I sit down at the computer. It puts me in that work mindset."

- Wendie DeLano, photographer and Stella & Dot sales rep, Levonia

Frances Public Relations went after giving birth to her daughter, Kinley, now 18 months.

"I loved my job, but we started doing the daycare thing and I was a month or so into it and realized, 'Something's got to go.'," she says. "On a whim, we ran the numbers and tried to figure out if we could do just with my husband's income."

For a while, Weber focused solely on launching her mom blog, [MrsWeberNeighborhood.com](http://MrsWeberNeighborhood.com), but soon started to miss having her own income. Now she's expecting a boy in August and works for Birmingham-based Hay There Social Media, serving a roster of clients from home using an iPhone and laptop. ▶



Wendie DeLano

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## WAHMS BY THE NUMBERS

**9.9 million**

American women, or 15.4 percent of the female workforce, work at home at least once a week.

**7.5 percent**

of women said they work at home to "coordinate work schedules with personal or family needs."

10% of women who usually work at home are self-employed

**30 percent**

are in management, professional and related occupations. Workers in finance, health and education were also among those most likely to work from home.

**1 in 5**

sales workers usually work from home.

**11**

The average number of hours per day put in by those who work at home.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Commerce Department Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2010



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# WAHMS

"I usually work wherever we need to go. Out in the backyard, my little one is running around digging up rocks, whatever she can find," Weber says.

She's not the only mom employed by Hay There. "There are about four or five moms working there. We do our weekly calls on Skype, and you'll see the kids popping in and out of the screens. Sometimes we have so many because the children are screaming," Weber says.

## TIME OF LIFE

Donna Albrecht of Brighton spent nine years working from home doing psychological transcription. For her, it was a way to get back into the workforce after a stint as a SAHM, but still be available to her young children.

But when the kids got older, it came time to get out of the house. Today, with her son in his junior year of high school and daughter off at college, Albrecht works two part-time administrative assistant jobs, at an elementary school and salon.


While she misses having control of her own schedule, being a WAHM served its purpose.

"Working from home had done what I wanted it to do, but it was time to get back into the [traditional] workforce again," she says.

And working at home isn't for everyone, she says. "It helps to be kind of an introvert, satisfied at home," she says. "If you rely on being around other people to keep you happy, you won't be."

## FIND YOUR BLISS

Isolation is what finally got so Carol

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### FINDING BALANCE FOR ALL MOMS

Whether you're a WAHM, SAHM or traditional working mom, it's important to keep the stresses of parenting in perspective. Royal Oak psychologist Donna Rockwell offers tips to do just that in the Parenting section of MetroParent.com.

## WAHM ADVICE

"I make it a point to make sure my kids are taken care of and their needs are met before I take a conference call or get knee deep into my work."

— Shannon Lacroix, CEO, GlassYouArt.com, Washington, D.C.

Palmer of Boundless Marketing, author of *10 Little Rules for a Blissful Life: Palmetto* was on the forefront of the WAHM movement, just as the Internet began to make it more accessible in 1996.

"It was kind of cool that I seemed to make a career out of this uncharted territory," Palmer says.

When her daughters were small, taking care of them and her business kept her non-stop busy. But when they went off to college, they left a huge void in their wake.

Her solution? She rented office space in downtown Brighton, where she now works at least once a week to meet clients and spend time in the outside world.

Although working from home "is not for the faint of heart," she urges other moms to take the WAHM plunge if that's their idea of bliss.

"The rules that you've been handed, the 9-to-5 you (the kids-in-daycare, if that doesn't work, then somehow find the courage to step up and make your own rules," she says.

But don't be fooled. Even though Palmer has actually worked from a beach, spending two months in a cottage on the Gulf of Mexico without missing a beat, the WAHM life is far from laid back.

"In all the years I've been at home, I've never washed harder in my life. We have cars to prove. We can be just as professional, just as efficient, just as good at what we do but in our flip-flops," she says. "We're for real here." MP

— Wendy Lee Shulick is a freelance writer and mom living in Brighton.



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