

Editor Mom

Around this time each year I start reaching for my favorite cookie recipes, hoping I'll have time to bake up a tray or two for my community's interfaith caroling party. But who am I kidding? Since I'm a working mother, the only holiday treat I ever get around to is a batch of "Instant Yums." To make them, you just melt down a package of chocolate morsels, fold in some coconut, and drop little clumps of the mixture onto a cookie sheet and refrigerate until they harden into candies. Instant Yums aren't pretty—and they're probably a zillion calories apiece—but they're mine! And some of my friends and family even join me in liking them!



We all have our sneaky little secrets for keeping craziness at bay during the holidays. You'll find some really good ideas in our article called "Calm and Bright," on page 25. I especially love the voices of the children in our story, reminding us of what's really essential this season. (Hint: It's not so much about shiny packages as it is about having fun together.)

Our children influence the way we look at work, too. In our Go For It! story, on page 51, Erica Carrasco says her two kids, Marissa, 4, and Noah, 2, inspire her to work hard and be a good role model. "Marissa already shows signs of strength and eagerness," Erica observes. "I want her to be a successful woman—and she will be successful—because I set the example."

That's a gift Marissa will never outgrow! We share something priceless with our children every time we let them know why our work matters to us. Let's keep sharing that gift all year long!

—Susan Lapinski, Editor-in-Chief
susanlapinski@workingmother.com

Be Our Next Cover Mom

We're always looking for working moms who amaze and inspire us—with their on-the-job successes as well as their parenting adventures. Tell us how you balance career and family. Share your tips, and be sure to include your name, age, children's ages, city/state, occupation, daytime phone number and a recent photo (pictures cannot be returned).

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Go For It!

**Job description**

Technical writer and website designer for an IT company with a U.S. Air Force contract; founder of my own design business, encgraphics.com.

Current salary

I earn \$35,984, but if I had a college degree, my boss says, I'd immediately get a raise.

Driving force

Showing my kids it's important not to give up on your dreams—even when the going gets tough.

Lunch fare

Frozen dinners—I can't afford to go out. And besides, I use my lunch hour to study for my BA.

Wish list

A nice house, two cars, money so my kids can do sports or gymnastics—things I couldn't do.

Business strategy

Bartering with a marketer who can help me launch my career.

Best thing my mom did

She watched *Sesame Street* with me, and we did flash cards. She never went to college, but she pushed education.

Designing Her Family's Future

Erica Carrasco dreams of growing a graphics firm but knows that success is in the journey
As told to Claire Whitcomb

When I was a child in Midland, Texas, my world couldn't have been more different from that of our most famous resident, George W. Bush. My family lived in a trailer. My father laid concrete. But we did know the Bushes in a roundabout way: My great-grandmother worked as one of their housekeepers, and she'd bring us the twins' hand-me-downs.

I realized early on that if you didn't want to keep house for the people with a college education, you'd better get yourself a degree. So I got

Go For It!



Erica's Balancing Tips

Zen shower. I get up early so that I can take a long, long shower. I listen to the water, get in touch with my thoughts and organize my day.

TV fun and games. When I'm watching TV with the kids, we sing the songs or get up and dance. I want to make TV time be together time.

Snuggle up. My husband and I snuggle on the couch. It connects us, even if I fall asleep.

Give him room. Being Mr. Mom is good for our finances but hard on Stephan's ego, so I try to give him room on the weekends to play golf with the guys. He gives me time for myself, too!

mostly A's in school, graduated early and enrolled in Midland College. I had it all lined up: a husband—my childhood sweetheart, Stephan—and a job at the local paper. But two thirds of the way into my journalism degree, I got pregnant.

Becoming a working mother at 20 was definitely not in my plans. I cried for 24 hours and then decided I was not going to live a life of regrets. I would show my child—Marissa is now 4—that if you believe in yourself, you can do

anything. I knew that having a child would give me even more drive and inspire me to make something of my life.

My dream is to devote my time to my own design business—a career that would let me work from home, give me more flexibility and enable Stephan to get his college degree. Ever since Marissa was a year old, he's been Mr. Mom, tending the home fires and working nights as a cashier. We'd agreed that since his work experience has

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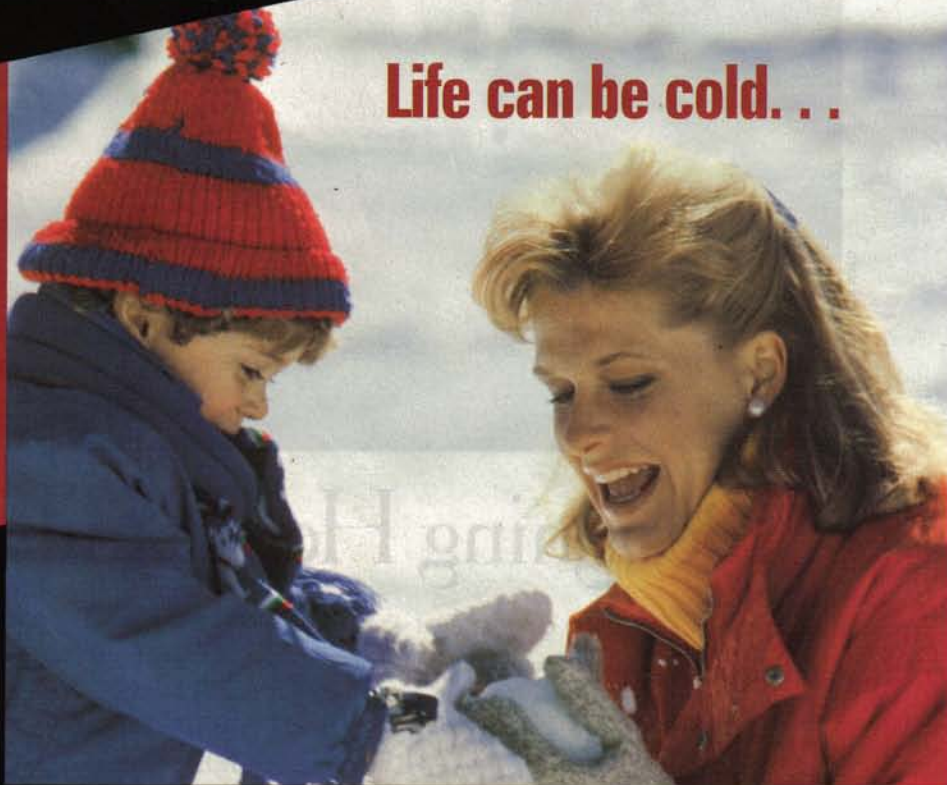
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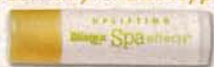
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mainly been in minimum-wage jobs, I'd be the breadwinner. So after our son, Noah, was born in 2002, we decided to move our family to San Antonio.

I couldn't afford to wait around for the perfect design job, so when I was offered a position as an entry-level technical writer at Northrop Grumman, a military contractor, I snapped it up. Now I'm working in a similar capacity for a company on contract with the U.S. Air Force. The sign by my desk says "technical writer," but because I don't have a college degree, I'm actually on the payroll as a publications assistant. There's a girl here just out of college making \$17.60 an hour—30 cents more than me for almost the same job! Granted, she has a master's degree, but it still hurts that I'm 25 and my seven years of work experience don't bring me up to her starting level. So I'm doing something about it.

At work I've made my interest in design clear, and I've been given a key website to create. Over the next two or three years, I plan to finish my BA in graphic design. For now, I'm taking online classes and using my lunch hour to study because I can't afford the child care I'd need if I went to night school.

Frankly, my biggest struggle has been Stephan's depression, which he's battled for five years. He's had a tough ride.

He didn't graduate from high school when I did. Then his dreams of becoming a Latin singer fizzled. Every time he went to the doctor he'd be prescribed a new antidepressant, and the side effects sapped his energy. Finally, last spring I told Stephan that he had to get his life together. He got the message. He weaned himself off his medication, and he's a changed man—energetic, full of ambition, the person I fell in love with. I can't tell you how much Stephan's turnaround has helped. I've posted my own website for my company, which I'm excited about, and I've listed myself on www.hispanicbusiness.com/redwire and got a new client. In my purse I keep a notebook with my goal written inside. It's one sentence: By 2006, the year my project with the Air Force ends, my business will be up and running.

Recently I asked my mom how she and my dad raised four kids without a spare nickel. "I took life hour by hour," she told me. "If you needed something, I bought it for you. If it wasn't essential, I prayed for the strength not to buy it."

Hour by hour, I tell myself. It helps me remember to play with my kids when I'm home, to dive joyfully into work when I'm at the office. But it also reminds me that you can only plan so much. The road to the future is full of curves, as I've surely learned. Am I where I want to be in my career? No. Will I get there? Absolutely! ▀