

Juggling Your Way Into Balance, Where We've Been

By Karin S. Syren

In the first of a series of articles dedicated to the unique juggling needs of women, we take a brief look at the journey of American women through the last 100 years. Throughout this period, women have shown themselves to be *resilient and flexible, persistent and determined, dedicated, diverse, courageous, and perennially undiscouraged.*

The 20th century brought with it a wave of altered roles for women, resulting in changed and expanded obligations, through which we consistently proved our *resilient* responses to an inconstant world. During **WWI and the Great Depression**, American women fought on the home front, rearing children alone and fashioning family life on a shoestring, often working long hours outside the home as well.

In the **40's**, our mothers and grandmothers mobilized the war machine, taking up welding bonnets and riveting guns and tending victory gardens by moonlight. We have been historically *dedicated* to our homes, our families and our country. When the boys returned as men, we gracefully stepped into wifely roles once more.

As housewives and mothers during the prosperous **50's**, we shaped the culture of the decade, finding outlets for our creativity and energies, while our husbands worked long hours bringing the new wave of prosperity to our doorsteps. We are historically *flexible*.

In the **60's** we stepped out and tested our independence. We opted for higher education, started moving toward financial independence as never before, burned our bras, stuck flowers in our hair and spoke out for peace and protested inequality, as our grandmothers had before us. We are historically *determined and persistent*.

The **70's, 80's and 90's** found us continuing to assume roles in the thick of things, making our mark on history in the latter part of a century marked by political and social upheaval. Women permeated society's key functions at all levels, accounting for 10 Nobel prizes in the last 20 years. We've pioneered in every field from science to literature, from music to medicine, from politics to business, from hundreds of feet below sea level to hundreds of miles above the earth's surface.

We've taught, evangelized, performed, healed, designed, discovered, invented, adjudicated, and administered. We've made policy, money, decisions, love, and babies. We've done practically everything men have, and made less money doing it, yet we are *undiscouraged*. But we are women first, last and always.

We are wives and lovers, mothers and grandmothers, daughters and sisters, and we must juggle daily, in ways men never do. We have birthed and buried, and in between we've always carried on. We are historically courageous. We are now, and always have been truly amazing!

The majority of U.S. residents are women. (United States Census Bureau statistics from 1999 - 2000) Fifty percent are married, living with spouses and raising an average of two children. Often we are living in blended families, raising our own children and the children of our spouses as well. Twenty-five percent never married, 13% are divorced or separated, 10% are widowed, and over 15 million of us live alone.

Most of us have completed high school. Twenty-five percent have a bachelor's degree or higher, and fewer than 10% have less than a 9th grade education.

The majority of today's women are part of the workforce, though most are still confined to traditional roles and we are still drawing salaries at only 72% of what our male counterparts bring home. Over a quarter live below the poverty line.

The extraordinary pie made up of American womanhood is 71% white, 12% African American, 11% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 1% native American. But we are all women, and we come together around the basics we share with one another. (The ethnic diversity statistics are based on 1999 census figures, for 139M females)

And we all juggle from the moment we open our eyes each day to the moment we close them again. No one tells us how and some are innately better at it than others. Some of us thrive on the challenge while others take life as it comes. Still others go through life frustrated in our attempts to juggle effectively.

But whether we know it or accept it or recognize it, we do it. No one is better equipped to juggle our lives than we are! We know them from the inside out and our waking hours consist of making choices, assessing priorities...juggling.

But, we can do better if we work together to hone our skills. We can gain, regain, and maintain control of our hectic lives by learning the simple steps to making more informed choices, We need not be at the mercy of the circumstances that assail us daily. We can develop a smoother rhythm to our juggling and a greater confidence that each one of us has designed, rehearsed and perfected her own personal Juggling Act.

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