

# Happy Mother's Day

by: Catharen Kann



## Transformation

The sun is rising. It is a weekday morning. Across our country, thousands of working women are engaged in a timeless ritual. It is the transformation from "Mom" to competent professional on the job. It is the most difficult part of the day.

The ritual is timeless because time is a murky factor in the equation. Even though one's children are up at a designated time, say 6:30am, it does not mean all will run smoothly for them to arrive at their destination — school, preschool or daycare — on time. Getting children ready in the morning is like the economy. Just as economists have trouble predicting if the job market is growing or stagnating because of the many factors involved, so it is with getting children prepared to start their day. So many details needing attention must be in sync for the morning to run stress-free and on time.

As the first rays of light break in the eastern sky, Career Mom opens her eyes with a startle. She finds herself staring into another pair of eyes, only five inches away. It is her three-year-old son, peering intently into her face, and he is saying something, as if she were wide awake. He says he is wet and thirsty. He wants to climb up on the bed, but Career Mom springs up to prevent this, since his pajama bottoms are wet.

Within one minute of waking, Career Mom is in full Mom mode.

The seven year old is already up, reading, and the five year old is filling a train car with miniscule Legos®. Mom attempts to run around the block and returns to assess the situation. Who needs a packed lunch? A nutritious home-made lunch requires vegetables and fruit, which means peeling and slicing. Lunch preparation is a timeless chore we all believe should take 15 minutes, but in reality, takes half an hour. If left to morning, Mom finds herself careening back and forth

between pouring milk at the breakfast table, and peeling and slicing apples at the kitchen counter.

Breakfast is cereal and frozen waffles. The five year old consumes two waffles with butter and enough maple syrup to partially fill an IV bag. Oh, no! His sister has touched his plate and a howl escapes from his throat. He cannot finish his waffle because now it has GERMS. Mom runs warm water over his hands. More waffles pop up. The five-year-old is back in the kitchen within three minutes. Another howl. Oh, no. His ARM is sticky. It needs to be washed, too. The three-year-old has built a wall of cereal boxes around his bowl, and is enjoying a leisurely breakfast as if he were an adult out for

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Sunday brunch, and the seven-year-old needs to be told that yes, she can butter her own waffle.

Multi-tasking is in full swing. Career Mom fields questions. Have you seen my library book? Mom, you need to sign this. She butters a slice of bread, and grabs a cloth to wipe up the spilled milk as it oozes toward the Cheerios box. She locates the thermos parts, takes out the ice packs, and says, "Yes, wear long sleeves today." And "What about your socks? Go find some socks."

The three-year-old slides by, nonchalantly trying to wipe his hands on Career Mom's black professional pants. She grabs him, washes him, zips up the lunch bags, and begins picking out his clothes. Wait. How did she get from the kitchen to the kids' bedrooms?

Career Mom is an expert at multi-tasking. That is how. In between all of this she has showered, done her hair, and dressed. However, it is at least another ten minutes before everyone is assembled with backpacks, coats, and out the door.

Any number of factors may throw things off. A young child might need an extra long time in the bathroom. A sock may feel funny and not be put on right. The hairbrush has gone walking. A child has disappeared into an Alice in Wonderland state in their bedroom, engrossed in conversation between a stuffed bear and a toy mouse. Native American Barbie suddenly must have her cape with the fringe, or the white truck needs its yellow trailer — right now! Gentle persuasions to leave the toys may result in temper tantrum behavior. The emotional climate in a household full of young children can change faster than New England weather.

As Career Mom helps the five-year-old tie his sneaker, the three-year-old nuzzles his face into Career Mom's shoulder. It is a lovely gesture, but it can't last because it is time to go.

Finally, whether by bus, car, or foot, the children are off. Now Career Mom can breathe a sign of relief and get to work, right? On the surface, yes, but inside, the debriefing process begins. Career Mom looks left, then right; there is nothing else to attend to, really. It is hard to process, and Career Mom, while en route to her job, spends the next five minutes accepting that she is indeed alone, with only her own needs to attend. Thoughts are still racing through her mind. She is used to doing two things at once, and now she must transfer to the adult world, where the pace is busy, but one task is accomplished at a time.

The leaves on the trees are bursting with shimmers of light green, and the

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sunlight reflects their perfect image in the water, creating a pastel water color effect as she drives across the river. She navigates her way along a main street full of shops in old red brick buildings. As the scenery changes, she becomes more connected with her working professional self. She takes deep breaths as she stares at the red traffic light, and begins thinking of the work agenda for the day.

Family thoughts interrupt like bubbles rising to the surface and popping. She imagines the seven-year-old finishing up her morning school work, and visualizes her three-year-old working on the art project of the day. She pictures her five-year-old laughing with his friends, and hopes he will not get flustered when he has to write. Will the three-year-old get another nosebleed at preschool? As the building where she works comes into view, these worries subside in a matter of fact way. There is nothing that can be done about them now, so why worry?

She pulls into the parking lot and performs one last Mom ritual: a quick glance down her shoulders and over her entire outfit. Career Mom is scanning her outfit for signs of children's toothpaste, maple syrup or waffle crumbs. This is part of every Career Mom's routine, subtly performed on the subway train, in the car, or in the parking lot.

And now it is time. The full transformation must take effect. She walks into work, greets her co-workers calmly, and delves into morning tasks. It is so easy compared to the management of young, fickle children.

A bubble of thought interrupts her. She remembers making sandcastle after sandcastle for her toddler on the beach, and watching his delighted face as he squashed each one. Exhausted, she gazed at the pile of ruffled sand, contemplating how she had made twenty sandcastles, and yet there was nothing to show for it. She knows that the true reward was inside her toddler, reflected in his triumphant face, master of his environment. She could only hope these lessons would build a foundation for a lifetime for this young, developing person. The rewards at work are so tangible, compared to the art of raising children.

A change of color flashes on the computer screen, and her thoughts transfer back to the memo she is writing. She spends the rest of the day engrossed in her work. Only twice, when she hears the phone ring an extra ring does she slip into Mom mode. There is that split second of fear or dread; for every Career Mom periodically receives a call that a child has become sick or been injured on the

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playground. However, only much later, back in the subway train or mini van will she allow herself to contemplate her children's day. Will her five-year-old proudly come home with another ship drawing? Did the three-year-old enjoy singing during circle time? Is the seven-year-old's math work challenging enough for her? By the time she picks the children up from school she will be fully back in Mom mode, as if they are her only concern in the world. And at that moment they truly will be.

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