Ruth Panofsky

Professor/Mother
The Uneasy Partnership

> Of all the professions, that of university teaching is the one in which women have the least number of children; this is unsatisfactory if women professors are to be able to live as full a life as anyone else. (CAUT *Bulletin* cited in Dagg and Thompson, 1988: 84)

My entry to the academy and motherhood was almost simultaneous and not altogether easy. I completed a Ph.D. in Canadian Literature in 1991, a time when there were few annual job postings across the North American academy. I was fortunate, however, in obtaining a Post-doctoral Fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Hence, I settled into a position at the University of Toronto, my host institution, and tried not to think beyond tenure of the Fellowship.

The future beckoned, however, as I entered my thirties and soon realized, in spite of career uncertainty, that the time may have arrived for me to consider motherhood, which I had delayed until completion of the doctorate. One year later, in 1992, I had given birth to a son and had taken a one-year maternity leave, which thereby extended the Post-doctoral Fellowship over three years rather than the usual two.

This paper charts a circuitous route toward a tenure-stream position, a route made arduous by a harsh economy and the demands of motherhood experienced for the first time and outside the relative security of tenured academe. It offers a personal narrative that describes the difficulty of continuing one's research and creative work; marginal employment as adjunct faculty; and the conflicting desire to spend time first with one infant, and later a second. The paper will show that motherhood, when combined with working conditions that arise out of a "straitened job market" (Aisenberg and Harrington, 1988:

134), can lead to marginalization within the academy. As my own case will demonstrate, success is possible—though never easy and achieved at some price—when one has the support of family, friends, and colleagues and can avail oneself of academic opportunities that arise. As Nancy Hensel (1990) notes, all women "have a difficult time in the work force because it has not sufficiently adjusted to accommodate the special needs of women.... The career cycle has not adjusted to allow time for childbearing [when] the conflict between work and femaleness becomes most intense" (5).

The apparent flexibility of an academic career might make it attractive to women, most of whom seek to balance work and family responsibilities. Indeed, an "academic career ought to lend itself to combining motherhood and work. The hours are flexible, the job is reasonably autonomous, and for many faculty there is time off during the summer and holidays" (Hensel, 1988: 4-5).

Lotte Bailyn (1993), however, recognizes the paradoxical nature of an academic career:

> Despite its advantages of independence and flexibility, it is psychologically difficult. The lack of ability to limit work, the tendency to compare oneself primarily to the exceptional giants in one's field, and the high incidence of overload make it particularly difficult for academics to find a satisfactory integration of work with private life.... It is the unbounded nature of the academic career that is the heart of the problem. Time is critical for professors, because there is not enough of it to do all the things their job requires: teaching, research, and institutional and professional service. It is therefore impossible for faculty members to protect other aspects of their lives, and work tends to dominate. (51- 52)

In recent years, academic life has become increasingly stressful for all faculty: "the competition is tougher than it used to be; the pay is low; resources for research and travel are tight; and mobility is lessened" (Hensel, 1988: 5). For women, that stress is intensified since they continue to "assume the major responsibilities for raising a family" (Hensel,1988: 5). Faculty women "may be competing against men who have more traditional wives to take care of the home and children" (Hensel, 1988: 5). Moreover, "uninterrupted time to think, read, plan research, and engage in technical writing" (Hensel, 1988: 5) often is limited for faculty women who must attend to the more immediate needs of their children. Angela Simeone (1987) cites one professor who laments the plight of "schedule-juggling women": "We all need time for sheer musing, for reading novels [particularly if one is a professor of literature], playing music, wandering about the river. And this is precisely what efficient scholarly women do not have ... We cannot respect our eccentricities, cannot honor them where they may lead us" (125).

Despite these difficulties, faced by all academic women but especially those

who are also mothers, the fact that I am in a position to write this paper is evidence of one woman's ongoing but successful resolution of the conflict that arises when a professor becomes a mother. Today, I am a tenured faculty member in a Department of English. Sadly, the vast majority of professor/mothers will not attain the status and security of tenured employment. Research shows clearly that

> marriage and family, while having a positive effect on the careers of men, has a negative effect on the progress of women's careers. Married women, particularly with children, are more likely to have dropped out of graduate school, have interrupted or abandoned their careers, be unemployed or employed in a job unrelated to their training, or to hold lower academic rank. (Simeone, 1987: 123)

Repeatedly, research confirms faculty women's experience of the academy as unsupportive of their roles as mothers.

This is not surprising. The university, an institution shaped by men for their own privilege, has a long history of excluding women as students and professors. Until the recent participation in the academy of growing numbers of women as graduate students and junior faculty, the experience of childbearing was divorced from academic life. The rearing of children always "has been a problem visible only to those who experience it, and they ... [have been] under subtle pressures to keep it invisible" (Finkel and Olswang, 1996: 125). Further, the

> pattern of the "traditional" family—father in the workforce, mother at home—was promoted assiduously after the second World War and is perhaps more deeply entrenched in the "monastic" atmosphere of universities than it is in the workplace in general. (Council of Ontario Universities, 1988: 137)

Hence, in academe, where men are "used as the standard of comparison for the evaluation of women" (Lie, 1990: 110), professors who also are mothers frequently face systemic bias against women generally, and mothers specifically.

The problem is analyzed by Robert Drago and Joan Williams (2000), whose recent comment applies to women across the academy:

> Raising a child takes 20 years, not one semester. [North] American women, who still do the vast majority of child care, will not achieve equality in academia so long as the ideal academic is defined as someone who takes no time off for child-rearing. With teaching, research, committee assignments, and other responsibilities, pre-tenure academics commonly work many hours of overtime. Defining job requirements in this way tends to eliminate virtually all mothers,

> so it is not surprising the percentage of tenured women in U.S. colleges and universities has climbed so slowly. (48)

Faculty women are "more likely than men to hold full-time, nontenure positions, positions of lower status in the academic labor market hierarchy" (Perna, 2001: 603). The general assumption that women choose to occupy positions of lesser status is not supported by current research. In fact, the careers of faculty women are limited by a number of factors, including geographic immobility, a constrained job market, career disruptions, household responsibilities, and caring for children (Watkins, 1998: 1). In all likelihood, however, since "tenure and childbearing years will coincide" (Glazer-Raymo, 1999: 98)—in 1995, the average Ph.D. recipient was 34 years of age (Drago and Williams, 2000: 48)—a faculty woman's decision to continue in nontenure employment often is "family-driven" (Watkins, 1998: 3). In May 2001, the American Association of University Professors confirmed the unhappy fact that although "increasing numbers of women have entered academia, their academic status has been slow to improve."

When I completed the Ph.D. at York University in 1991, I was hopeful and ambitious, determined to remain in academe, and committed to further scholarly research in the field of Canadian Literature. I was aware, however, that the job market I was about to enter was painfully competitive, with few available openings across Canada and the United States. Hence, in the final year of the doctorate, as I completed the dissertation, I prepared as practically as possible for my academic future by submitting an application for a SSHRC Post-doctoral Fellowship. Fortunately, my application was successful and I could look forward to a period of intense research at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library of the University of Toronto, where I undertook a study of the writing and publishing career of novelist Mazo de la Roche. In accordance with Fellowship regulations, I also was free to teach one course per semester.

Upon graduation, my personal circumstances were not unlike those of many faculty women. I was childless but already married for six years and I had interrupted my studies to help support my spouse through law school. That support had been returned during my doctoral studies. I intended to continue within the academy but my mobility was limited by my spouse's training as an Ontario lawyer. If I were to accept a position outside of the province, he would need to requalify, a commitment to further education that appealed to neither one of us. In fact, the problem of how to balance the needs of two aspiring professionals is common to dual-career couples. My own situation was overdetermined, however, by a severely constrained job market, which offered few opportunities for employment. Hence, I settled into my position at the University of Toronto and resolved to integrate my work and my life.

Suzanne Stiver Lie notes, for the majority of women "higher degree studies often coincide with marriage and childbirth" (1990: 112, 114). Although I was married when I began my doctoral studies, I chose to postpone childbirth until

completion of the degree, feeling that caring for children would hinder my progress through the degree requirements. The desire for greater financial stability also delayed my entry to motherhood. With the offer of the Post-doctoral Fellowship, as secure a form of employment that I could anticipate for the near future, I soon contemplated pregnancy.

In the past, faculty women often felt unable to combine an academic career with child rearing, and the academy has vigorously reinforced that perception. In December 2001, the Council on Anthropology and Reproduction issued this bleak statement: "our profession provides precious little support for those of us who have attachments to other people, or devote part of our lives to the work of nurturing children and other human beings."

Increasingly, however, faculty women are refusing to choose between a career and having children; in fact, many are "refusing to believe that such a choice is necessary" (Aisenberg and Harrington, 1988: 112). Some women postpone childbearing until they have achieved tenure, but for many the delay is too risky. Princeton University President Shirley M. Tilghman candidly admits that many women in her "generation chose to forego child-bearing until the security of tenure had been granted, only to find that their biological clock[s] had stopped ticking" (1993: A23). Still, many faculty women remain childless. A recent article in the *Guardian* cites this sobering advice offered by one faculty woman: "'Don't have children. It sounds awful but it's what I think'" (Berliner, 2002: 12).

I understood the medical risks I might face were I to postpone having children indefinitely. I also understood that my decision to become pregnant, bear, and raise a child would have significant implications for my career. But having waited until I had completed the doctorate, my spouse especially was anxious to start a family and soon we embarked on the intensely personal journey toward parenthood.

For the most part, pregnancy did not interfere with my post-doctoral research. I continued my work at a steady pace and in the final trimester of pregnancy undertook an extended research trip to libraries in Kingston, Ottawa, and Montreal. Since my son was due to arrive in June, I taught until the end of the academic year.

Although I had read books on pregnancy, delivery, and motherhood, nothing could have prepared me for the experience of becoming a first-time mother. Perhaps I was naive; more likely, I was in shock. Having enjoyed the intellectual stimulation and relative freedom of the academy, I felt overwhelmed by the sheer physical task of caring for a newborn. The newness of the experience and the demands of an infant absorbed me and, for a time, I felt removed from my former self.

When I had regained sufficient composure—it has never returned to pre-motherhood level—I turned my attention to arranging childcare for my son. As much as possible, I meant to conform to "the 'clockwork' of the academic career [that] demands commitment to continuous or almost continuous employ-

ment" (Cass, 1983: 145). Moreover, since I had yet to secure a tenure-stream position, I wanted to retain contact with my colleagues at the University. Hence, I took a one-year, unpaid maternity leave from the research fellowship, but I undertook to teach two full-year courses when my son was two months old. Mistakenly, I thought teaching while caring for a newborn would prove manageable. Thus began a life of fragmentation that included nursing, childcare, teaching, and research; it continues fragmented to this day. Like the majority of faculty women who also are mothers and whose lives are "intimately tied to the important processes of birth, nurturing and care," my career has been "characterized by *discontinuity*" (Lie, 1990: 116).

For many academic women who seek a balance between career and family, particularly for those who face a constrained job market, part-time teaching may seem to offer a temporary but workable compromise. Most women, however, who still occupy the majority of adjunct teaching positions, "simply are unaware that no amount of part-time work aggregates into tenure-track eligibility; rather they see part-time teaching as a welcome way of holding on to both the life and the work" (Aisenberg and Harrington, 1988: 126).

Women's efforts to continue as members of the academy are further undermined by the lack of quality childcare. Few universities, for example, have on-sight daycare facilities. Existing facilities often are costly, with little available space. One assistant professor, the mother of two small children, comments: "I am willing to work hard to qualify myself for a top position in society, but when my children suffer because of poor childcare, I become paralysed" (Lie, 1990: 122-23). Professor/mothers, who require quality care for their children if they are to thrive in academe, understand such paralyzing fear. My own history of childcare successes and failures—ten years of institutional and in-home care—is corroborated by current research that shows the absence of satisfactory and flexible childcare arrangements to be a serious hindrance to women's participation in the academy. As Judge Rosalie Abella affirms, "Childcare is the ramp that provides equal access to the workforce for mothers" (cited in Council of Ontario Universities, 1988: 141).

My situation as an aspiring academic who also was a mother was made especially difficult, first by the straitened job market, and later, following completion of the research fellowship, by my entry into sessional employment. Determined as I was not to abandon teaching, I secured a number of adjunct and sessional positions between 1994 and 1998. The experience proved invaluable when I was hired into my tenure-stream position in 1999, but the lack of security during several years of teaching at various universities and colleges—all located in the Metropolitan Toronto area—was stressful. In addition, the time I could devote to research often was curtailed by heavy teaching loads and my desire to nurture my son (born in 1992) and my daughter, (born in 1996) when I still was seeking permanent employment.

What I could not have anticipated prior to becoming a mother was the need—biologically driven, it may well have been—to be close to my children.

In fact, my entry to the academy was complicated not only by the lack of available jobs; the desire to pursue teaching, even in adjunct positions; and the drive to continue my research, despite limited time for concentrated effort. It was shaped equally by my experience of motherhood and my deeply felt desire not be parted for long periods from my children. In the early years of my children's lives, I wanted, quite simply, to be with them as their mother. The academy, however, does not accommodate that desire. Rather, it demands full participation from all faculty, including faculty women—with or without children—who hope one day to attain the status and security of tenure.

When I became a mother, my professional commitment did not diminish; rather it coexisted alongside an equal commitment to family. Both scholarly training and motherhood had expanded my sense of self, and I determined to integrate my work as an academic with my life as a mother. The struggle to do so was and remains uneasy, but I was fortunate in several respects.

First, I have had emotional and practical support from my spouse who shares equally in caring for our children and running our household. Together, we have faced childcare crises, career difficulties, and financial setbacks. Moreover, when my son was diagnosed at age 4 with a mild chronic illness, we rallied and will continue to do so. Second, the encouragement of my former supervisor, with whom I collaborated on a scholarly book published in 1997, was sustaining. Today, he remains an ally. Finally, I was able to secure employment through my connections with the heads of several Departments of English, who would offer me teaching positions when they became available. Hence, I continued with my scholarly research and cobbled together various teaching assignments, all the while attending to my two children. When my schedule permitted, I took the opportunity to be with them; otherwise, I relied on childcare. In addition, I began to write and publish poetry that grew out of the visceral experience of mothering. Concision, however, ought not to belie the constant fatigue, persistent stress, lack of leisure, and ever-present worry over family and work that underlie this narrative. Beneath these lines of tidy prose runs a teeming river that at every bend has threatened to overflow the calm shores of a life.

By 1996, I had taught English at two universities and three colleges within the greater Toronto area. I was unsatisfied in my position as adjunct faculty, but throughout the 1990s few tenure-stream positions in Canadian Literature would become available. In the summer of 1996—when I could conceal the fact that I was four months pregnant with my daughter—I was interviewed at Ryerson University for a part-time teaching position. As a former polytechnic, Ryerson had been granted university status in 1993 and was seeking faculty with doctorates to teach its students in diverse programs.

In the fall of 1996, when I first taught a course in Canadian Literature at Ryerson, I sensed growing opportunity. Here was an institution in transition and I felt a groundswell of forward movement on campus. I continued teaching over the next two years and rarely missed a class—even when I gave

birth to my daughter in mid-semester—or an opportunity to make my presence felt among the English faculty. In 1998, while I held a sessional appointment at the University, I applied for one of two tenure-stream positions in the Department of English at Ryerson that were advertised to begin in August 1999. I just had been awarded a second significant grant—a Canada Council Professional Writer's Grant in support of a study of the novelist Adele Wiseman—which strengthened my application. When the interviews and job talks finally were complete and I had been offered a tenure-stream position in Canadian Literature, with a reduced probationary period, I felt elated and overwhelmed. It had taken me years, but I had secured a tenure-stream position. A vision of a life that combined an academic career and mothering had led to my success.

Suzanne Stiver Lie concludes:

> From a life-course perspective, women are at a *cumulative disadvantage* in academe. For most, a late start, long periods of employment outside academe, childcare breaks, and caring and administrative responsibilities in the home make it more difficult for them to establish their careers than men. This in turn results in less time for research, fewer contacts, fewer resources in the form of assistants and funding. A complex web of institutional, cultural and personal forces create barriers to women's advancement in academic careers. (1990: 124)

Whether or not they face a straitened job market, faculty women remain disadvantaged in academe. The academy continues to reward early and sustained achievement, a distinctly male model for success that often eludes women who must demonstrate academic excellence as they bear and raise their children. I have argued here that my personal story is one of triumph, but it also is one of hardship that echoes across the stories of many faculty women. Motherhood is not a luxury and women professors should not experience guilt for desiring—or not desiring—children.

It should be less difficult for faculty women who also are mothers to remain in the academy, and remedial steps recently have been taken to better the likelihood of continued success for professor/mothers. Maternity and parental leave policies have improved, for example; resources for child care have increased; and tenure decisions may be delayed to accommodate extended leave periods. But the "number of women in higher faculty ranks [still] is significantly less than the number of men" (Hensel,1990: 8). If faculty women are to move beyond the ghetto of low ranking academic positions to achieve the success that is their due, they require broad-based institutional support. If professor/mothers are to share in that success, they require all the support they can muster.

For research assistance, the author thanks Maja Baltus.

References

Aisenberg, Nadya, and Mona Harrington. 1988. *Women of Academe: Outsiders in the Sacred Grove.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

American Association of University Professors. n.d. *Statement of Principles on Family Responsibilities and Academic Work.* <http://www.aaup.org/re01fam.htm>.

Bailyn, Lotte. 1993. *Breaking the Mold: Women, Men, and Time in the New Corporate World.* New York: Free Press.

Berliner, Wendy. 2002. "Give Us a Break." *Guardian* 19 March: 12.

Cass, Bettina. 1983. "Woman's Place or Domestic Contradictions?" *Why So Few? Women Academics in Australian Universities.* Bettina Cass, et al., eds. Sydney: Sydney University Press. 122-52.

Council on Anthropology and Reproduction. n.d. "CAR Statement: 'Reproduction in (and of) the Profession of Anthropology.'" <http://www.geocities.com/anthrorepro/>.

Council of Ontario Universities. 1988. *Employment Equity for Women: A University Handbook.* Toronto: Council of OntarioUniversities, March.

Dagg, Anne Innis, and Patricia J. Thompson. 1988.*MisEducation: Women & Canadian Universities.* Toronto: OISE Press.

Drago, Robert, and Joan Williams. 2000. "A Half-time Tenure Track Proposal." *Change* 32 (6) (Nov.-Dec): 46-51.

Finkel, Susan Kolker, and Steven G. Olswang. 1996. "Child Rearing as a Career Impediment to Women Assistant Professors." *Review of Higher Education* 19 (2) (Winter): 123-39.

Glazer-Raymo, Judith. 1999. *Shattering the Myths: Women in Academe.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hensel, Nancy. 1990. "Maternity, Promotion, and Tenure: Are They Compatible?" *Women in Higher Education: Changes and Challenges.* Lynne B. Welch, ed. New York: Praeger, 3-11.

Lie, Suzanne Stiver. 1990. "The Juggling Act: Work and Family in Norway." *Storming the Tower: Women in the Academic World.* Susan Stiver Lie and Virginia O'Leary, eds. London: Kogan Page. 108-28.

Perna, Laura W. 2001. "The Relationship Between Family Responsibilities and Employment Status Among College and University Faculty." *Journal of Higher Education* 72 (5) (Sept.-Oct.): 584-611.

Simeone, Angela. 1987.*Academic Women: Working Towards Equality.* Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey.

Tilghman, Shirley M. 1993. "Science vs. Women—A Radical Solution." *New York Times* 26 January: A23.

Watkins, Regina M., Margie Herrin, and Lonnie R. McDonald. 1998. "The Juxtaposition of Career and Family: A Dilemma for Professional Women." *Advancing Women in Leadership* 1(2) (Winter): 1-7.