

A REVIEW OF THE FAMILY AS AN ECONOMIC UNIT:  
(Summary of Part I of the Working Paper of the  
of the Working Group on Matrimonial Property  
of the Family and Children's Law Reform Commission)

Murdoch V. Murdoch made the news; how many others didn't? The law assumes that the wife who performs ordinary housekeeping duties has no claim to a share in the assets amassed in her husband's name.

*"What do you do around the house all day anyway? Drink coffee and gossip? Watch soap operas? Play bridge and golf? It's a lazy life; no justification for sharing the fruits of My labours."*

What Does a homemaker do?

The commissioners recognize that the family performs many important social functions but, in the paper the concern is with the economic functions.

"The home [is a] social unit which maintains the capacity of those at work or at school to function effectively in their roles outside the home. From this point of view the home is a place where people are stored when they are not at work, where they are maintained, serviced, fed and cleaned, where they are psychologically repaired and the injuries of the daily routines and the tensions generated on the job or at school are made good. In important ways it provides for the adjustment and integration of biological systems with the economic and organizational requirements of society."

These functions are largely the responsibility of the homemaker. It is through her management and organization that these things get done.

*What do you do around the house all day, little woman?*

Many attempts have been made at assessing the contribution of the homemaker to the national economy. But the very nature of the job renders it incalculable in monetary terms. Homemaking involves a wide variety of tasks (see chart) and requires the skills of a number of other occupations. Often the organization and managerial skills are ignored in assessment of the job. These in practice vary greatly depending on the economic and social position and on the life style of the family. But all family units require management and this function may even be crucial to the survival of a low income family. Ironically, the more efficient the management the less visible it becomes.

Attempts have been made to assess the job of "homemaker" by determining the number of hours it involves. This of course varies greatly from family to family, but the assessments in terms of hours/task usually neglect the "continuing responsibility of the mother for the care and safety of her children even when she is not actually doing something for them. There is, moreover, a 24 hour on call stipulation attached to the job. There are no set vacations, no set hours or days off, and no pay."

All this and more:

Behind every successful man there is a little woman nagging, or to put it nicely,

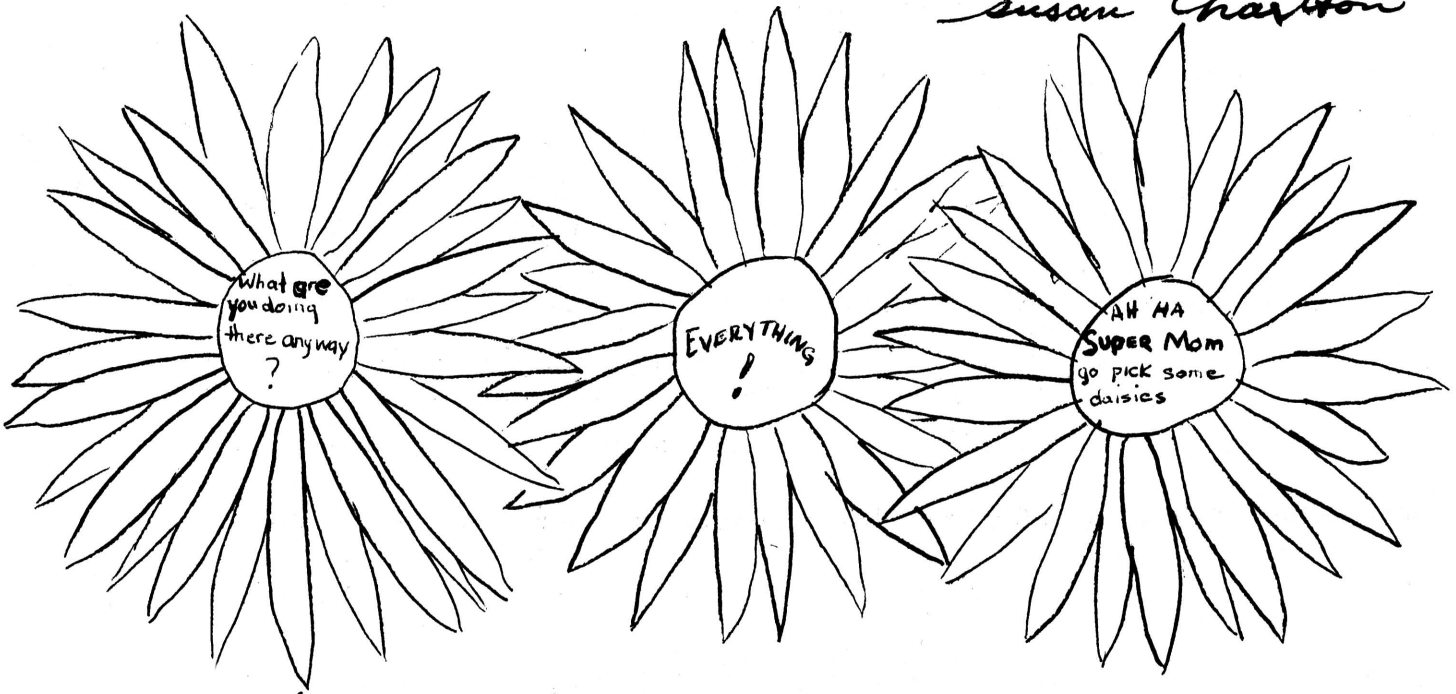
The Homemaker contributes to the earning capacity of the "head of the household". And how!

She routinely provides for his needs. She services and maintains the house and equipment, maintains the supplies. And all this is done in such a way to co-ordinate with HIS work schedule, and to "provide for the leisure time on which his effective occupational functioning depends in part." And when he is sick....

But back to that managerial function and the time, thought and effort it involves. It serves to relieve the "head of the household" of the responsibility and worry associated with the home and children. Therefore, his capacity to put his energies into his occupational role is greatly enhanced. Any single parent will vouch for this.

According to existing laws the earner's input to the family is in terms of financial support; the homemaker's in terms of "housework". This is much too simplistic and ignores the actual economic interchange between home and work. As we have seen, homemaking contributes to and is essential to the functioning of the wage earner. Assets are accumulated by a functioning family unit. Surely the partners in the unit have equal rights to those assets and equal responsibility for their management.

*Susan Charlton*



I'D PICK MORE DAISIES!

If I had my life to live over, I'd try to make more mistakes next time. I would relax. I would limber up. I would be sillier than I have been this trip. I know of very few things I would take seriously. I would be crazier. I would be less hygienic. I would take more chances. I would take more trips. I would climb more mountains, swim more rivers, and watch more sunsets. I would burn more gasoline. I would eat more ice cream and less beans. I would have more actual troubles and fewer imaginary ones.

You see, I am one of those people who lives prophylactically and sensibly and sanely, hour after hour, day after day. Oh, I have had my moments and, if I had it to do over again, I'd have more of them. In fact, I'd try to have nothing else. Just moments, one after another instead of living so many years ahead each day. I have been one of those people who never go anywhere without a thermometer, a hot-water bottle, a gargle, a raincoat and a parachute. If I had it to do over again, I would go places and do things and travel lighter than I have.

If I had my life to live over, I would start barefooted earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall. I would play hooky more. I wouldn't make such good grades except by accident. I would ride on more merry-go-rounds. I'd pick more daisies.

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