

A housewife frankly estimates her true market value, as a domestic necessity. Her conclusion? . . .

My Husband Ought to Fire Me!

By PEG BRACKEN



A "rare moment of order" in the author's household. Her husband is writer Roderick Lull. The baby is Johanna, 2.

If you are at all attuned to the times, you know that a housewife isn't a housewife any more; she is a homemaker. She is a versatile expert, a skilled professional *business manager*, *practical nurse*, *house cleaner*, *child psychologist*, *home decorator*, *chauffeur*, *laundress*, *cook*, *hostess*—all this, besides being a gay, well-groomed companion. And she is therefore worth, at prevailing wage rates, about \$20,000 a year—or, anyway, a lot more than her husband.

A lot of recent literature has tried to establish this point. Some of it is written by men, and I can't decide whether they are chivalrous or just cowed. But that quiet tittering you hear in the back row comes from the women, who know different. Housewife, homemaker,

it's still spinach. Women are honest about the important things. This is one of their many lovable qualities.

Well, it is fun to be chuckled under the chin, but reaction sets in the minute we housewives—and I think I'll just continue to use that dirty old word—the minute we housewives really look ourselves in the eye. Practically any housewife who tots up—as I have just totted up—what she'd be worth in today's labor market is apt to find herself in a nervous condition bordering on the shakes. From my own computations one salient fact emerges loud and clear: all my household skills together wouldn't earn enough to maintain one small-sized guppy.

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"Would any husband in his right mind pay anybody for getting into messes like this?" asks the lady.



be spared possible damage that might be sustained should they happen to bang against the lock walls in transit.

At Knife River Harbor, Minnesota, on Lake Superior, the Engineers have begun improvements that will cost Federal taxpayers at least \$257,800. At the time the project was proposed, the known beneficiaries were six fishing vessels and four pleasure craft, plus ten other fishermen who indicated they "might" berth there after the improvement was completed. Critics pointed out that the value of privately owned land in the vicinity would be enormously enhanced—a pork-barrel by-product from which land speculators frequently profit.

Scituate Harbor, on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, is a favorite spot for yachtsmen, but average annual commercial traffic was only seventy-six tons from 1949 through 1952. No commerce at all was reported in 1953. Despite this singular lack of business, the 1954 appropriations act contained \$375,000 for digging deeper, wider channels and constructing two additional anchorage basins.

Out in Oklahoma and Arkansas there is a vast project embracing all elements of pork-barrel-logrolling politics. It is the hydra-headed proposal to develop the Arkansas River basin for navigation, hydroelectricity, flood control and numerous other purposes, including recreation, municipal and industrial water supply, draining, soil conservation—in short, the works. Congress already has authorized \$1,200,000,000—and this is just a starter. There are related proposals for developing the entire Arkansas-White-Red River basins, extending into seven states. An Inter-Agency Committee estimated the total cost of all A-W-R proposals advanced to date at more than \$5,000,000,000, and the scope is constantly growing.

For years I have observed water-resources development, and I am appalled at the cost of keeping the pork barrel filled. The Government receives virtually no reimbursement from flood-control and navigation projects, and large Federal subsidies are involved in irrigation, drainage, pollution abatement and similar developments. Can we expect really economical projects to be built by public agencies when the beneficiaries repay little or no part of the cost? The answer obviously is no.

Over the years, various groups under both Democratic and Republican administrations have urged a cessation of the costly rivalry among the empire-building Army Engineers, the profligate Bureau of Reclamation and other Federal bureaus and departments, particularly the Agriculture Department's Soil Conservation Service. There now are twenty-five main Federal agencies in the water and power business, and eight other bureaus and offices which dabble in the same field.

In their zeal to outspend one another, the rival Federal agencies are literally

pouring billions of taxpayer dollars down the rivers. In certain types of projects administered by the Engineer Corps, there are legal requirements that Federal funds be supplemented with a proportionate contribution of local dollars; yet this provision all too often is ignored. On the House floor, Representative Jensen, of Iowa, admitted, "There are projects in this bill that cost millions and millions of dollars where there is not one red penny of local contributions."

The United States Comptroller General recently cited to Congress a curious example of seeming indifference to the taxpayers' welfare, wherein the Corps of Engineers actually refused a contribution proffered to the Government by a benefiting private company. At Oswego, New York, one company alone stood to save \$435,000 annually through harbor improvements.

"The company offered," the Comptroller General related, "... to advance \$100,000 to the Federal Government to commence work on the project. Despite its willingness... cash contributions toward the construction cost were not recommended by the Chief of Engineers because the benefits to the company were considered to be savings in transportation costs that would be passed on to the ultimate consumer."

This "consumers' savings" argument, incidentally, was shaken a few years back when an oil-company traffic manager admitted to a House investigating committee that consumers saved exactly nothing through cheaper river shipment of gasoline made possible by Federal subsidies. "Our market is determined on the rail rates," he said. "That is the only basis we use. . . . We put the money in our pocket like everybody else."

While much of the blame for this outpouring of billions must be placed on

overly ambitious Federal agencies and on Congress which accedes to their demands, the onus for continued congressional logrolling and pork-barrelism must be shared by the public. Without public pressures, congressmen would not be so quick to vote billions to improve channels for private yachtsmen, to build public power dams under a multiplicity of guises, to provide cheap transportation for special interests, and to undertake so-called flood-control measures of dubious practicality.

The demoralizing effect of logrolling was driven home by Appropriations Committee Chairman Cannon, who told the House, "It is becoming more serious every year. When men organize and gang up on the committee and the Treasury, they confess the poverty of their cause. If their project had any merit, it would not be necessary to trade and traffic."

If we really want economy, we must send to Washington a Congress composed of men strong enough to slap down the free-spending agencies. Further, we must strengthen our congressmen's backbones by showing them that we really believe economy should begin at home, not in the other fellow's district, and that we will elect—not defeat—they if they legislate in favor of the taxpayers instead of the special interests.

How long can America afford to keep on sluicing its great wealth into the rivers and harbors to satisfy local interests and to perpetuate ambitious men in public office?

The prospect of a \$70,000,000,000 water bill is not only frightening, it is suicidal. If we are going to dam anything in this country, let's leave the overdeveloped, overprotected rivers alone for a bit—except for bona-fide projects—and let's dam this eternal, pork-tinged spending.

THE END

Answers to

Where Do You Think You Are?

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- | | | |
|----------|----------|---------|
| 1. R.I. | 2. Wash. | 3. Ind. |
| 4. Pa. | 5. Tenn. | 6. S.D. |
| 7. Nev. | 8. N.C. | 9. Me. |
| 10. N.M. | 11. Col. | 12. La. |

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My Husband Ought to Fire Me!

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In a word, nobody would have me except a husband. What is more, I'd call this a fairly general state of affairs.

The blunt fact is, most housewives are pretty good at a couple of things, fair to middling at a couple of others, and as for the rest, they do them when and if they have to, and lousily. A man never knows which one or two housewifely talents he's getting when he marries either. No matter what good fudge she made in her bachelor-girl apartment, he can't be sure! That is one of the things that make marriage so exciting.

Let's admit it: we housewives are jugglers who, trying to keep a dozen nice big fresh eggs in the air, spend most of our time skidding in the shells. Once in a blue moon, for the fast wink of an eye, all the eggs stay up. The popovers pop, the checkbook balances, last month's permanent is holding its own, and the children love each other. Providence hands out these moments, one or two per decade, as a tantalizing vision of what life could be like as lived in the center of the impossibly squared circle. But for the most part, we just mouse along, putting one saddle shoe in front of the other, which is generally in the flypaper, bending over to pick up the floor mop and dropping the baby.

But don't think for a moment we're unduly upset about this. You get used to anything.

Perhaps it would be helpful, in this little social study, to consider separately some of the areas in which we housewives daily demonstrate our *expertise*—this is a word which social studies always use instead of "expertness." For example, let us look at the field of business management.

I would like very much to know what kind of tranquilizer pills they are on—these people who say that we housewives are skilled business managers—and whether the stuff is available at my favorite grocer's. It might help to assuage the dim, general unease that seems to assail most women when they have to think about money.

Look at it this way: women spend about 85 per cent of the country's income—you read that all the time. And the country is *enormously* in debt. There you have it.

Observation leads me to believe that most women pursue a financial course similar to my own. That is, no matter what amount of money we start the month with, it won't quite reach. We can't squeeze up the month to fit the money, either, so there we are, always with that perilous chasm ahead of us.

Of course, there are always charge accounts. I know a lady who took out two \$250 revolving charge accounts—the kind on which you pay twenty-five dollars a month plus 1 per cent on the unpaid balance till hell freezes, because somehow the unpaid balance is perpetually about \$225. She didn't know that all those little 1 per cents on the two accounts add up to a tidy fifty-four dollars a year. Let's face it: what I mean is that I didn't realize this. But after all, hell may freeze sooner than you think, what with the atom and everything, so I don't believe I'll do anything about it yet. Anyway, tomorrow I have to think about washing the woodwork.

I also know a lady who went to an auction and picked up a nice ten-dollar table for seventy-five dollars. She has a

dandy collection of trading stamps, though—almost enough for some pillow-cases.

And speaking of trading stamps, consider the general bafflement of us skilled business managers when we are confronted by such simple, everyday matters as where to park the car when we lunch or shop downtown. Most of us decided long ago that meters were too expensive

... ..

Cause for Alarm

That God made time the
stars attest,
But clocks were Satan's little
jest.

By Georgie
Starbuck Galbraith

... ..

at five cents per half hour plus the \$7.50 tow-away charge. (That's what it is in our town if you stay there even a smidgin past four-thirty.) So we use parking lots. I, for instance, have four to choose from, all equally close to the scene of action. But the problem is the choosing.

Parking Lot A charges thirty-five cents for the first hour and twenty-five cents for the hours thereafter and gives you trading stamps. Parking Lot B charges a straight twenty-five cents per hour and gives you no trading stamps. At Parking Lot C you get your first hour scot-free if your bank stamps your parking ticket, but inasmuch as you have to do some business with your bank before they will stamp it, and inasmuch as you practically never have a deposit to make, this means

writing a check which you hadn't planned on writing. And Parking Lot D shows similar largesse of spirit if you have made purchases totaling not less than one dollar at any of three department stores.

Admittedly, figuring out which one is cheapest poses a mathematical problem which makes the $E=mc^2$ equation look like a child's apple-counting game. Yet you would think that after all this time I'd have arrived at a sounder solution than simply taking turns at all of them and probably wasting money like mad, which is what I do.

But this is a depressing subject. Let us push on to practical nursing.

I feel strongly that as Ladies with Lamps, we housewives are hardly ten-watt. We are sympathetic, mind you. The other night my husband went to bed with a wrenched back, looking green, and I felt so bad about it that I got up and took a vitamin pill. But, though we're long on sympathy, we're mighty short on the old home remedies. Also, we panic easy when something is the matter with somebody, because everything is so complicated today.

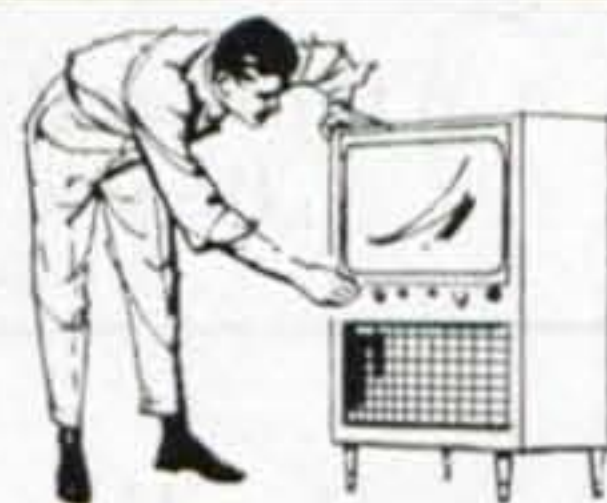
Great-grandma could brew up a mess of sheep dip and clam juice for a cold because she had never heard of strep throat or Asian flu. But these days, when a germ attacks the home front, we housewives tend to think this thing is bigger than both of us, and we call a doctor. For the most part we function on an aspirin-and-iodine economy.

I do know one lady who is a born nurse, but her family just never gets sick, so she nurse's-aides at the hospital and her house looks awful.

Which leads us right into the important area of house cleaning. Housewives, the articles say, are skilled professional cleaning women too.

Now this simply isn't true.

...that gets you down



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