

and the thistles; and there's not much time between the pickers and the frost, so we take them, to fill our jars, to save them from neglect. We have endless uses for tomatoes and pack them wantonly away. We can them whole for beans, and spiced for soup, pureed for sauce and cooked down with peppers and onions and brown sugar for relish. We even bring home the green ones to chop with raisins and suet for mincemeat; but best of all, we slice them for supper, red and ripe, with platters of cucumbers and corn on the cob.

That's September: a mad rush to catch the golden horn before it drops, burst and spoiled on the ground; to fill your cupboards with gleaming fruits like jewels against the grey rains. Here in Provo, with books all around me and an "eight pound for a dollar" apple in my purse, it's still the harvest in Willamette, and I long to spend it at home.

## *CONFESSIONS OF A SUBURBAN HOUSEHUSBAND*

MERVYN DYKES

"LEAVE HIS DIAPERS OFF FOR A FEW MINUTES each day," said Tina, my wife. "It will do him good." So I did, and that was how I came to be on my hands and knees cleaning the carpet. The battle with diaper rash and soiled carpets was just one of many strange incidents that followed my decision to become a suburban househusband. One moment I was saying: "There you go . . . have a kick around." The next, I was cleaning something.

Some incredible times have taught me that an adult and an infant can become companions. We share jokes, hold intense conversations in strange languages, play games, experience moments of discovery, or just sit quietly, linked by the silence true friendship sees no reason to disturb.

Perhaps I should explain that Adam is not my first child. I have had plenty of time to lose the rosy glow of parenthood. Before my adventure in househusbandry began, I was no stranger to the ways of children, having come from a big family where I had to help care for my younger brothers and sisters.

What was new for me, though, was being the sole companion of a baby for nine hours of every day. Anyone can help out now and then, but to provide sustained service is one of the highest achievements of mother or fatherhood. I now have a much deeper respect for my wife and my parents, in spite of having

thought before that I loved them as much as I possibly could.

An old fairy story tells about a farmer and his wife who, to settle an argument, decided to switch roles and see who had the hardest work to do. They quickly came to appreciate each other's abilities and were only too happy to revert to the normal arrangement.

In my family's case, my wife had often expressed a desire to return to the work force "to meet people and really contribute to the family."

"You are contributing already," I said.

"I know that, but you are meeting people. There are days when I feel really shut in."

"It's no fun having to go to work whether you feel like it or not," I pointed out.

"Yes, but you are getting out!"

Before our first child, we had worked as journalists on rival newspapers. In those days we often told each other how lucky we were to have jobs we could do at home. But my wife found that freelancing from the kitchen was not as easy as it sounded.

"I need an office atmosphere as an incentive," she said, "and maybe even someone to bully me along."

The answer came unexpectedly. After a period in which we ran our own newspaper in the country and I served as president of a branch, we returned to the city where I started work on a morning daily as late man from 6 P.M. to 2 A.M. An advantage of this was going to be all those daylight hours in which I could write all those books I had been meaning to write for years.

While I was about it, I thought, why shouldn't I babysit during the day so my wife can get a job?

"Are you sure you can manage?" she asked several times.

"Of course," I replied.

"You won't get any work done—any writing work I mean."

"Oh yes I will. All those hours—all that free time."

As she swept away to fill out a job application, I wondered why she was laughing.

For the first few weeks things were fine. Besides doing the agreed-upon minimum chores—making beds, doing the breakfast dishes, supervising the preparation of school lunches, and giving the house a once-over-lightly with the cleaner—I was able to care for the baby, wipe out a reasonable pile of laundry and write myself into a stupor.

I wasn't getting much sleep, but I had never seemed to need much before.

Tina was reveling in her job too, coming home excited each night and unloading her experiences at machine gun pace above the rattle of pots and pans as I prepared the evening meal.

The kids quickly adapted to having a dad around the house instead of a mom. On my part I learned that when they came through the door, I was supposed to stop what I was doing in order to give them a full debriefing after their foray into the outside world. While this was going on, I collected handfuls of paintings, demands for school fees, notes from the PTA and requests for strange items that were essential for class projects.

Above it all I can recall hearing my own plaintive voice: "Please, guys, don't

hang your books/bags/coats/shoes/lunch leftovers on the floor!"

As the weeks flicked by, the novelty began to wear off in direct proportion to the mounting laundry pile. I began to feel tired, listless and short-tempered. I ate too much and typed too little. I started to resent not seeing much of my wife. When I wanted to talk to her, she was either asleep or about to go to sleep. When she wanted to talk to me, I was busy with dinner preparations. Most nights now, I was arriving at my job a few minutes late and building up feelings of guilt and defensiveness.

One afternoon while Adam was having a nap, I spent nearly an hour staring at my typewriter and doodling, thinking how unloved and unappreciated I was. Everything looked grim and black. I had read about this problem in the magazines but had dismissed it as something that attended people who suffered from a lack of imagination or enterprise. Never could it happen to me.

But it had. Was this what Tina had meant when she said she felt shut in? Was all this fruitless prodding of my typewriter a sign that I too needed an office atmosphere in order to work?

To keep myself from going under, I quickly ruled up two columns on my notepad and began to write down the pros and cons of the last few months:

I had finished a book started before my wife had taken a job.

I had written a travel book.

I had edited a book for a publisher.

I was half-way through a TV play.

I was revising a series of children's stories.

I was publishing a how-to-do-it book for home writers.

I had put together a concept for a magazine of my own, and I had secured a contract to write four more books.

In between I had written a score of magazine and newspaper articles and done several PR jobs for friends who could not afford a consultant.

At church I was just about as busy. I taught two classes and served as ward mission leader and as a member of the stake seventies council. Largely because of professional qualifications, I was also co-opted for regional and national publicity committees.

No, it was clear that I should stop feeling sorry for myself and start re-reading the Word of Wisdom, paying particular attention to the verses about eating wisely and getting proper sleep. So Adam and I started taking naps together each morning. In the afternoons, we often sprawl on the floor watching his favorite TV program, "Play School." At other times we do constructive things with his building blocks, or have wild games of chase. He comes home teaching with me and my companion some afternoons and has even been to a business lunch with a publisher.

When I started watching him as a pleasure rather than a chore, he opened a whole new world to me. This time with him has given me moments of such happiness that I am writing faster and with greater desire in the shorter time available.

But best of all are the shared moments of discovery. In one of them, Adam was sitting on the lounge carpet playing with a whistle. He knew it should make a noise, and he knew the noise was somehow made by putting the whistle in the