

AUSTRALIA'S BIGGEST MORNING TEA

CANCER COUNCIL OF NT LAUNCH - 22 MAY 1997

MRS LESLEY CONN, Vice Patron of the Cancer Council

LINDA FAZELDEEN, Chairperson of the Cancer Council Board

AND FELLOW MAD HATTERS

I am very pleased to be here with you today.

Congratulations to the organising committee for such a fun way to launch this important event - a Mat Hatters Tea Party.

Judging by the number that have come along today to participate in the Tea Party I am sure that the biggest morning tea will be achieved.

I must congratulate the Cancer Council in raising community awareness towards all forms of cancer and in the way that the information is disseminated. The information is readily available and the message is clear.

The trick is to get people to take notice.

Fund raising and community support are so important and the Cancer Council has come up with some great ideas to develop both. The recently held monsoon ball was a roaring success, raising over \$10,000.00. A brilliant effort and as one of my friends would say, it was a very good look.

I have been asked to speak to you today on my experiences in juggling life at the top. I have been told that this topic was chosen because many people have commented on my success in juggling my many roles and responsibilities.

The use of the word juggling is very apt. I have often thought that my life, particularly in more recent times, is something of a circus. There is a lot of fun and excitement but behind all the glamour is a lot of painstaking effort and organisation.

And I have no doubt that that applies to everyone of us who have tried to balance the demands of spouse, family, paid and unpaid employment.

To be a little ego centric let me spend a few minutes describing my situation.

I am a solicitor. I am employed as a senior lawyer with the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission. My role is partly case work ie. dealing directly with clients and largely administrative. I usually describe the administrative component of my work as a dogs breakfast, a little bit of this, a little bit of that and a lot of what no one else would want.

But that's OK because like many a dogs breakfast it often contains a little bit of lobster and champagne as well as the usual baked beans and sausages.

As a legal practitioner I am well paid and well regarded.

I have 2 children, a 7 year old and a 15 month old baby. They are the paspaley pearls of my collection and life is joyous and wonderful because of them. As a mother I am well rewarded.

I am married. Perhaps I should have mentioned that before I mentioned the 2 children. My husband has a busy and time consuming job. He is often absent from home. These things do not make him particularly unusual. The fact that he is a high profile politician and that much of our life is conducted in public is what makes our life a little unusual.

In this role I am required to attend and host state functions, not only in the Northern Territory but also interstate and overseas. That sounds glamorous and it often is. It also means a lot of time away from home and the children.

This is the public aspect of my life. I am ambivalent about it. I constantly wonder whether the rewards are matched by the effort, the sacrifices that have to be made, not only by myself but more particularly my children.

I have family and friends. As the NT News pointed out last year I no longer have a dog. He found the publicity surrounding his perfectly ordinarily canine habits a little disconcerting and opted out. Front page coverage, an editorial, 2 Wicking cartoons, a parliamentary debate and a mention in

Hansard. Most politicians would kill for that sort of coverage. All Sharka had to do was snap at the postman, a most unusual doggy habit.

It is something of a juggling act to balance all of the above roles and all that they mean without dropping the balls. By this I mean go stark staring mad or at the very least develop a face that looks like a Sydney road map.

But juggling is something that a great many of us, particularly women, have become very good at.

Let me tell you a few interesting statistics, if there is such a thing as an interesting statistic.

Australians spend about the same number of hours per week on unpaid work as they do in paid employment.

Unpaid work is mostly done in the household by women. For example, cleaning, cooking, shopping, gardening and childcare.

Women, regardless of income, education, social background, employment or age do 70% of unpaid work or on average about 36 hours per week.

Men do less than half that amount.

What do the men do with their 30%? Outdoor tasks, like maintaining the car, the pool and the garden. Plus a lot of time on play such as sport and travel.

So, the wife generally still does the cooking, the cleaning and the childcare, while the husband cleans the car and pool. Guess who gets to clean the toilet?

When a woman gets married, she not only acquires a husband and probably sexually transmitted debt, she also increases by 60% the time she spends on food preparation and cleaning.

Her fortuitous husband reduces his commitment to these activities by 25%.

When this happy couple produce a child the new mother's hours of unpaid work increase by 91% to nearly 56 hours per week.

On average the new father will not increase his level of unpaid work. He will however spend more time at paid employment.

Don't think however that the situation will improve when that baby becomes a teenager. If the mother takes on full time paid employment of 35 hours a week or more, her child will do an extra 18 minutes of unpaid work a day (that's a little over 2 hours per week).

Retirement, you might think, will bring a reduction if not an end to unpaid work. Alas, not so.

Compared with younger married women, a retired married woman spends nearly double the time preparing food, one third more time cleaning and one quarter more time doing laundry and ironing.

Well, fellow Mad Hatters, how do we jugglers manage to keep all the balls in the air without dropping them.

For my own use I have developed a few simple rules.

Rule 1 - The kids have priority.

But there is a sunset clause on this rule. About 20 years.

Rule 2 - Superwoman is a fantasy. I accept that there are some things that I can do and do well and there are some things that just have to be left for another time.

Rule 3 - You can have it all but there is a price. The trick is to work out how much one is prepared to pay.

Rule 4 - Forget housework. There are more important things. Men never notice anyway unless it is to create more of it for you to do. And the kids get absolutely no pleasure out of toys unless they are spread from one end of the house to the other and really that's only ever a problem when you are trying to wade through the mess in your high heel stilettos and your best pantihose.

Rule 5 - Forget ironing. Buy drip dry.

Rule 6 - Forget cooking. This is not to suggest that one forgets to eat but merely that one rearranges the method by which food is brought to the table.

My son Jack, like a lot of 7 year olds acquaints takeaway food with French cuisine. Eating vegetables is simply the price he has to pay in order to watch tv later. The baby wolfs down everything in sight before she's even had a chance to see what it is anyway. Because of her eating habits I do sweep the floors regularly. Her liking of crunching on cockroaches is a little offputting. In twenty years of marriage I have not learned to cook and have no intention of doing so. My lack of culinary skills is probably the reason Shane spends so much time in restaurants.

Rule 7 - Don't worry, be happy. If you are going to get wrinkles it may as well be from having a good time as a bad one.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm happy to answer any questions.

I thank you for your time.