

# **Mom went back to school**

**By Sharon Cadwallader McGraw**

***This is the true story of a thirty-something-mom who went back to school in the '90's. No names have been changed.***

**In September 1990, after a 20-year hiatus, I decided to go back to school to get my high school diploma.**

**The decision wasn't as hard as it might seem. I'd been working at the Post Office and six years of mundane, monotonous work was more than enough to convince me that there had to be more to life than sorting letters.**

**It seemed so simple at the time. The kids were growing up so they didn't need me at home all the time. My postie job was at night, so my days were free. Did I say simple? It was anything but.**

**The first hurdle was announcing the big decision to the family. Going back to school would mean going from full-time work to part-time (which meant my income would drop by almost half).**

**"We'll just have to get used to having a little less money," I cheerfully told my husband. He grunted.**

**"Everyone will have to pitch in and help," I told the kids, "and get used to us having a little less money".**

**Son Josh, ten at the time, promptly went out and found a job delivering flyers. He likes money and wasn't taking the chance of becoming a deprived child.**

**My oldest daughter Sandra thought her mother going back to school was the best thing she'd heard since CD players were invented. (Hey, it was 1990.)**

**"I know you can do it Mom," she said, giving me a hug.**

**Then there was 14-year-old Theresa. She looked me straight in the eye and said, “You’re just going back to school so we don’t get smarter than you.”**

**How could I argue? I’d sneaked a peek in the odd textbook over the years. These kids were doing things in math I’d never heard of. And computers! They’d come home talking about bytes and hard drives and I’d wonder what the heck they were being taught.**

**Okay, that wasn’t the reason I was hitting the books after so many years, but she had a point; except for English (I read a lot), I was definitely out of touch with education.**

**September that year was a good month. We scheduled everything and it worked like a well-oiled clock. Lunches were made the night before to make mornings as smooth as possible. Alarms went off throughout the house as timed intervals, giving each person ample time to use the one bathroom. I came home in the afternoon, had time for a tea and to make nice dinners. Homework came after the dishes and if I didn’t have to work, the evening was free.**

**“This is a breeze,” I thought one night while relaxing; going back to school wasn’t such a big deal after all.**

**By October, the schedule was just a bit ragged around the edges. Let’s face it, the novelty had worn off. Homework was piling up for everyone and the lunches often didn’t get made until the morning. Then we started sleeping in, which caused another small glitch in the “schedule.”**

**Have you ever seen five tired, grumpy people fighting for one bathroom? It’s not a pretty sight. One morning as I was getting ready, trying to ignore Josh’s furious banging on the door, I lost it.**

**“You’re a boy,” I hollered, “Go in the backyard if you can’t wait!” Desperate times call for desperate measures.**

**Afternoon teatime had given way to naps and supper was now whatever I wasn’t too tired to make.**

**By November, I realized some changes had to be made. You know that old saying, “cleanliness is next to godliness?” Don’t believe it. I lowered my housekeeping standards considerably and the earth didn’t open up and swallow me. The dust bunnies multiplying under the furniture quickly mutated into dust cows and we took to keeping the lights low; not for the ambiance, but to hide the dust.**

**One day in December, I came home early and made cookies, something I hadn’t done in months. Josh came home from school and ran into the kitchen.**

**“Finally, you’re acting like a real mother again,” he said as he hugged me. But by January, he discovered he could make cookies himself and that cookie making wasn’t a job restricted to “good mothers”.**

**Going back to school taught me a lot. Not just the lessons in class, although it was nice finding out I could do math and become computer literate, but about my family and myself.**

**I learned the joy of sharing a kitchen table with my kids while doing homework. Sure sometimes we argued over how much space we were each allotted for our books, but it was fun. I learned that my husband, 25 years out of school, could still factor numbers. (I don’t know how anyone could remember how to factor after all that time but he did and often helped me with my math homework.)**

**I realized I love to write this--after informing two English teachers I would appreciate it if they wouldn’t make me do too much writing). Thank goodness, they didn’t listen to the pleas of an insecure, scared woman who hadn’t written anything more than grocery lists and absence notes for her children in 20 years.**

**Most of all, I learned just what a terrific family I have. There were times when I felt like giving up, only to hear one of my kids say, “Come on Mom, you can do it”, or “you dropped out once, do you really want to do it again?”**

**Early in January, I made another momentous decision. I had three more credits to get for my diploma, but then what? Would it really make a difference in job prospects? I already had a job that paid**

**fairly well and knew that money wasn't the problem. The problem was, I didn't want to work at the Post Office and even with a diploma, what else was I qualified for?**

**I decided to go to college and study journalism.**

**The first hurdle was telling my family. Two or three years of less than part-time work, Going to college would mean taking an education leave, working maybe two nights a week.**

**"We'll just have to get used to having less money," I told my husband. He grunted.**

**"I'll need even more help than before," I told the kids. "College means more classes and homework. Also less money."**

**Josh gave up plans to retire from the flyer-delivering business. Sandra gave me a hug. "I know you can do it Mom," she said. Theresa smiled at me and didn't give a smart-aleck remark about my motives - an unmistakable vote of confidence from the family skeptic.**

***Sharon completed her college diploma in Journalism. She is now working as a secretary for a large high school in the Toronto area. She also works as a free-lance writer. She does not work at Canada Post.***

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