

Getting to 50/50

EXCERPT

Introduction - Imagine a full life – there's no need to choose

Do we know you?

You worked hard to get where you are. You pushed yourself in school, got a job and gave it your all. You learned your trade and found your strength, spurred on by the challenge of doing things well. When you see the next mountain, you gear up to climb it.

Along the way, you think about meeting the right guy. Or maybe you've met him and he has joined your journey. Either way, you see how linking your life with a man's may change your course:

Setting out, it all seems simple. It's fun to be a twosome and you help each other when the ground gets rocky. If he slips, you steady him; when you lag behind, he pulls you up. You map out your future together, and it's good. Two people joined by love and shared dreams. This is the marriage you hope for.

Then, one day, you take a grand new path: parenthood. No longer a couple, you're a family. While you pause to adjust to this miracle, your husband resumes his course. But with a baby in tow, you're carrying a bigger load and you wonder what pace you can keep. The mountain seems bigger than it did before – more forbidding, and a whole lot colder.

You look into your child's eyes and wonder, How much will I miss when I go back to work? Should I slow down to keep you safe - even stop altogether?

Other voices echo yours. Those who once cheered you on now ask, "Do you have to work? Won't the baby need you? Do you really want to leave your child with strangers? Does your salary even cover child care?"

Back at work, some colleagues now see you differently.

"You seem less focused. We'll ask Jack to help you run that project."

"We restructured the group while you were out. Half your team now reports to Charlotte."

"Commitment is important. We'd like to see you here more hours."

And you see things differently too. Do we need the third staff meeting? Is the trip to Tuscon really necessary? you start to ask – time is no longer something you give away freely.

You look to your partner for support, but he faces a steep grade himself. Convinced he must "provide for the family," he resolves to work even harder. You call to him for help – did he hear you? You ask him to take his share of the load but he worries he'll stumble if he does.

"I know it's my turn to do daycare drop off but can you do it? I have an early meeting."

"The baby is calmer with you. He always fusses when I try to feed him."

"There are no other dads at the playground and the moms look at me funny. Can't you do the play date?"

One day you wake up and wonder, Why not just quit? You see your paycheck depleted by child care costs and your time vanish as each day repeats itself: dressing your child, feeding her, going to work, coming home, feeding her again, and putting her to bed (with hopes that she'll stay there). Weekends are cram sessions of diapers, groceries, laundry, errands, and the occasional night out that takes as much planning as a space shuttle launch. You begin to think of your spouse as a kindly roommate who usually remembers to put the seat down.

You're still giving it your best at work, but you're tired and scared about the not-so-subtle signs that no one thinks you'll stick it out. On bad days, you ask yourself, Can't we make-do without my income – just for a while? You certainly wouldn't be the only working mother to "opt out." You can tick off a half-dozen ex-colleagues, all mothers, all talented in different ways, who drove off into the sunset, children strapped safely in their car seats. You keep hearing that voice, Is it really worth it?

You bet your kid's college tuition it is.

We're going to show you precisely why working is worth it for you, your children and your spouse and how both your family and career can flourish – by tapping into a powerful ally. It's not your babysitter, your Blackberry or your boss (though they come in handy). Here's a hint: You married him.

Getting to 50/50: The life-changing journey

We are two working moms who believe that everyone wins when men are full parents and women have full careers. When both parents pay the bills and care for kids, this life is possible – we know from experience. In our homes, we don't assume that mom is destined to be the "primary parent." Our kids see dad as equal to mom because we set it up that way. True, we did 100% of breastfeeding and sometimes only we can make the monster under the bed disappear. But, dad loves parenting as much as we do – and he's good at it too. There is also no "primary breadwinner" among us. Mom and dad are both on the hook for the costs of raising kids, from groceries to braces, from housing to soccer cleats. The pay-off? We enjoy rewarding careers and see that our families thrive – not despite our work – but because of it.

"Don't you really need to choose? Won't I need to pick which comes first, my work or my family?" We hear this often from women in their 20s on campuses where we speak. (We rarely hear it from young men). And even when young women are more hopeful, there's a big disconnect between what they hear (you're equal) and what they see. "These issues creep up on us without our being aware of them," one 30-something told us, "I think women my age believe the world has changed so much that we don't need to worry. But then we look at the

men in charge where we work and think, 'that is not what I want my life to look like and it's clearly not feasible for me if I want to have kids.'"

We remember the angst we felt at their age, that somehow things would be tougher for us than they were for our guy friends. At times in each of our own careers, we shared the fear that we'd have to forfeit something big – a career or a husband.

"I'll never find the right guy if I can't ever leave the office," Joanna, then a lawyer in her first 24/7 job, complained to her mother. At her second corporate law firm, still unmarried but curious about the future, Joanna went to a meeting on work/life balance. The discussion leader, the only female partner with children, started to cry. Not inspirational. Joanna had grown up with a mother who mostly stayed home. So the discouraging signs around her at work did not give Joanna much conviction that she would want to keep working after she had kids.

Sharon, a child of divorced parents, assumed she'd always earn her own living. No man Sharon dated could miss the point. She grilled boyfriends for double standards and gave them books such as *The Women's Room* and *The Feminine Mystique* – which largely went unread. Working stock-market hours in San Francisco, Sharon was in the office near 4AM – and asleep by 9 PM, making her an even more unusual date. Turning 31, Sharon walked down the street after work one day with tears in her eyes. "No marriage is better than a bad one," she thought, "but how did I end up alone?"

Then we met our husbands and learned this: The most important career decision you make is who you marry. (And the deals you make with him).

When they got engaged, Joanna's finance, Jason, told her he wanted to start companies. To take the risks that entrepreneurship requires, Jason knew that sometimes he would be putting more money into his business than he'd be taking out. When Joanna wanted to quit her job, Jason did his share of childcare while Joanna transitioned to a career she found more satisfying than the law. Jason not only wanted to be a good father, he also knew Joanna's income bought him freedom to pursue his own career dreams.

"Women are more nurturing and should stay home with kids for a few years," Sharon's future-husband Steve said on their first date. That evening did not end well. But Steve, an Iowan raised with the virtue of fairness, was curious (and a good sport). So he asked Sharon to put her thoughts on paper. "I want my husband to share every part of parenting with me 50/50. How do you feel about this?" Sharon wrote. Steve wasn't sure but kept an open mind until he and Sharon found a vision they could share.

We're not saying it's easy. Living this way takes lots of discussion and often debate. No matter how fair-minded your spouse, if you're anything like us, you'll still find plenty to argue about. But hundreds of men and women in this book tell you in their own words why they make the effort: The 50/50 mindset can help you live the life you want.

Excerpted from **Getting to 50/50** by Sharon Meers and Joanna Strober Copyright © 2009 by Sharon Meers. Excerpted by permission of Bantam, a division of Random House, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this excerpt may be reproduced or reprinted without permission in writing from the publisher.