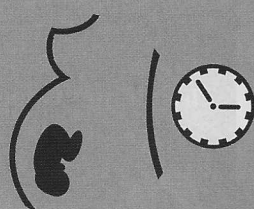


Taking Yourself Out of the Game

The Freak Out that Accompanies Becoming a Stay at Home Parent **BY ELISABETH ALLIE**

START!

CONGRATS!
You're Pregnant!



YAY!

You Have A Baby!



DO STUFF...

GO BACK TO WORK



DO YOU...

NOW DECIDE!

OR...

STAY HOME



GAME OVER?

WORKING IN THE COMICS industry was incredibly fulfilling for me, both professionally and personally. Not only did I get to be part of the worldwide geek community, but it's how I met my now-husband and became mother to my awesome 10-year-old stepson, Sid. But when our daughter, Sarah, was born last September, I decided to quit my job as Senior Marketing Manager for Things From Another World and stay at home. And while I'm so happy to have this irreplaceable time with my daughter and son, I can't help but feel a twinge when I'm invited to a comic book signing (that I didn't arrange) or hear news from the latest convention (that I stayed home from). Because the game is still being played. Without me.

When I first became pregnant, the idea of quitting my job was extremely alluring. Come on, who *doesn't* fantasize about quitting her job after a tough week? Plus, looking at the costs, I realized that full-time daycare for an infant and after-school and summer daycare for our son would eat up the majority of my paycheck—so why not stay home?

But at the same time, I was terrified. I was almost 40 years old. I'd supported myself since college. Quit my *dream job*? In an industry I loved—which my husband was a big part of, too? What if we stopped having things to talk about? What if I got bored? What if I never found another job? What if my children grew up and decided I was a big stupid boring jobless loser???

Then Sarah was born, and midway through my maternity leave, I knew the decision was already made. I was always the employee whose co-workers would wearily tell to "Go home!" at the end of the day. But now I had a new obsession—my daughter—and there wasn't enough of me to go around.

I felt like I was swimming underwater the first three months after Sarah was born, just trying to survive being needed *all the time*. Getting out of the house once each day to pick up Sid

from school felt like a victory. So the reality of my situation didn't really hit until after Christmas. I had quit my job. Sarah was on a regular sleep schedule, and I felt like a human being again. There were no holiday preparations or events to get ready for. What was I supposed to *do*?

The first thing I did was make a list of house projects. The second thing I did was freak the hell out. Is this what my life was going to be now? "*Hi honey, how was your day?*" "*Oh, I organized the basement and did three loads of laundry, tee hee!*" Sure, selling comics wasn't saving the planet—but it was a lot more interesting to talk about. I felt my self-worth steadily shrinking, along with my bank account. My mother, herself a stay-at-home mom, told me matter-of-factly that my husband would have to start giving me an allowance.

After I stopped *screaming inside*, I gave myself a hard shake. Wasn't raising our children and running our home important work? Wasn't it something I enjoyed, and something I was pretty good at? My husband wasn't just supportive and respectful of the situation: Having me take over nearly every aspect of our lives so he could focus on making comics was his dream come true!

So I've taken my checklist- and spreadsheet-making skills and applied them to our home, finances, and social calendar. I got Sarah on her various schedules by keeping a minute-by-minute log of her sleeping and eating habits and looking for patterns. (Shut up, it worked.) I occasionally propose projects to my husband like throwing a mini comic book convention in front of our house. Hey, it could happen! But the most important thing for me to remember is that this baby's a full-time job. And that's nothing to be ashamed, or freaked out about. **t**